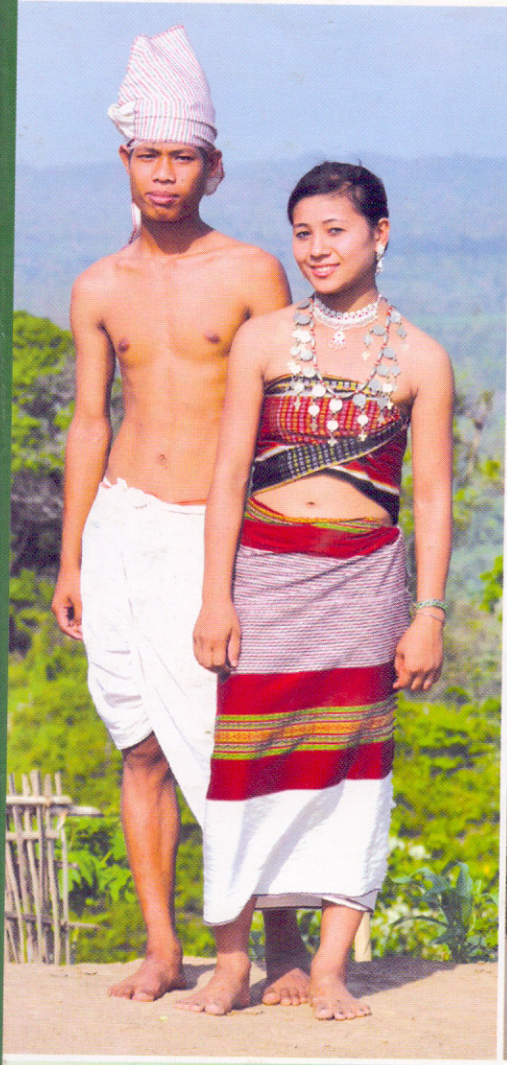
A Socio Cultural Study on the *Malsom* Tribes of Tripura

— Dr. R. N Sen



Tribal Research and Cultural Institute
Govt. of Tripura

A Socio-Cultural Study on the Malsom Tribe of Tripura

Dr. Ramendranarayan Sen

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Govt. of Tripura

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FOREWORD

The book entitled as "A Socio-Cultural Study on the Malsom Tribe of Tripura" presents ethnographic account of the Molsom Tribes. In this book Dr. Ramendranarayan Sen has given the detail description about the settlement pattern, origin, demo graphic profile, economic life rites & rituals, religions life, music, dance, games of Molsom tribes.

I think the book will be of inensehelp to the reader, Research scholars, educationist and administrators.

(SAILOHNUNA)
Director
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A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY ON THE MOLSOM TRIBE OF TRIPURA

Preface

I developed an interest in tribal studies when I was a student of anthropology in the University of North Bengal in the early eighties. I thought of studying a relatively unknown tribe in Tripura since that was incidentally my home state. From the little information that was available on the tribes of Tripura I got to know that the Molsoms were one of the erstwhile *jhumia* tribes and the members of this tribe were taking to settled cultivation fast. This was one of the tribes which was in close interaction with the non-tribals in the plains of Tripura at the economic, social, cultural, and political fields, and I thought it would constitute a good research problem to do an explorative, ethnographic study of the social and cultural life of the Molsoms and the changes they were experiencing. In 1987 I joined the tribal welfare department of the state in the month of September as an official. And after that my relationship with the Molsoms no longer remained that of a subject-object relationship. I had to draw an insight of the tribal life and their mind-set in order to frame policies and implement them to resolve some of their social problems. I could not but feel concerned about their hardships, their backwardness, and problems. My role thus turned out to be like that of a participant researcher. This means I had to interfere in mobilising them for the sake of successful implementation of the development policies meant for them. I began my study in the middle of the eighties and it took me about 15 years to complete this project. This inordinate delay demands an explanation. In the later part of the eighties the tribal insurgency was intensified in the state and it was highly risky to venture into the tribal bastions in the remote areas of the state. I therefore had to wait for long years to complete the remaining part of my fieldwork. Secondly, following the conditions of my service I was not able to manage enough time to sit down and concentrate in writing the thesis. Thirdly, I was badly entangled in sorting out some of my critical family problems which took my concentration away from the present work. In spite of this long delay I have tried to update the information used in this thesis and, I am sure, it will not sound outdated.

Chapter — 1

Introduction

An outline of the problem of study

This is an ethnographic explorative study of the Molsoms, a little known tribe in Tripura, a small state in the North East of India. An attempt has been made here to draw an account of the society and culture of the tribe through an extensive fieldwork conducted in the eighties in nine Molsom settlements, of which five were in South Tripura district and the remaining four in North Tripura district. A first hand observation of the economic activities, social organisation and cultural life of the Molsoms helps dispel many of the established and superficial notions about the community. The study underscores the fact that the Molsoms constitute a distinctive community with an identity distinct from similar other tribal communities like the Kukis and Halams. This is, in no sense, a study of the static social and cultural features of the Molsoms; instead, it has set out the social and cultural features in the light of the changing realities and contexts.

No tribal community can afford to live in isolation from the other tribal and non-tribal communities. The tribal and non-tribal communities live side by side in close interaction as they participate in the process of modern state building. In the economic, social-cultural, and political fields these communities cannot but interact with each other at both group and individual levels. This inter-community interaction, which has been always growing in intensity and sphere, is creating a social space where these communities can share each other's cultural symbols and change. It is not always the question of mutual sharing of each others symbols, but sometimes it becomes an interaction of the 'dominant' and 'subordinate' cultural forms where the earlier prevails over the latter. The 'subordinate' is left with no other choice but to accept the 'dominant' social and cultural forms since the latter possesses larger control over power and resources. The existing mode of control of the forces of production and power and the prevailing democratic arrangements may not facilitate the desired forward movement of the tribal communities. The resultant sense of relative deprivation and backwardness may influence their pattern of interaction with other communities, especially

with other dominant communities. It may also affect their participation in the democratic political processes. The tribal communities may look at the developmental packages offered to them by the government and the cultural packages offered by the dominant communities with a great deal of suspicion. In such a situation the tribal communities develop a shell encircling their socio-cultural life and take all efforts to make it immune to external forces of change. Whatever may be the case, these external and internal factors help understand the dynamism in the social and cultural life of the Molsoms. It is generally observed that the tribal-nontribal interaction creates an opportunity for a mutual exchange of culture traits, but such an exchange can take place only up to a point. The outside culture can penetrate into the tribal life only in certain spheres because the tribals take special care in retaining their core cultural forms which they have developed over generations.

While going through the literature available on the tribes of Tripura, and which has been written mostly by the non-tribal scholars, I have realised that the anthropological tradition of first hand collection of data through prolonged fieldwork by learning the language or dialects these communities speak, and by earning their confidence, has not been given its due importance. As a result, the studies appear to be fur removed from the everyday life of the tribal communities. In conducting the present study I have made a sincere effort in drawing a true ethnographic account of the social and cultural life of the Molsoms.

In the literature and in general understanding there are misconceptions about the status of the Molsoms. This prompted me to take up the task of prepaing a narrative of how the Molsoms emerged as a distinct tribal community and how they earned a distinct identity of their own. An analysis of the folk tales and the available stories and literature has helped me in this mission.

An interesting shift is fast taking place in the economic life of the Molsoms. A tradionally *jhumia* tribe the Molsoms have been fast adapting to the changing realities. They are making some significant adaptive changes in their cultivation-practices where they are continuing with *jhum* cultivation and in most cases they have abandoned *jhum* cultivation and taken to settled cultivation. The shift from *jhum* to settled cultivation does not have

consequence on their economic life alone but it has fur reaching consequences on the social life and on the cultural practices. Besides exploring these areas it would be interesting to see the difficulties they face while trying to respond to the challenges of market economy and the occupational diversification they experience in the process.

An intensive study of the house types, food habits and dress patterns constitute an important part of an ethnographic account of a tribal community. The ecological setting, the economic condition, access to technology and resources, tradition and the community's exposure to outside world - all this together condition the house-types, food habits and dress patterns. Any anthropologist coming from outside would be impressed to study these aspects of material culture of the Molsoms. In studying these aspects with great interest I was also keen to look into their logic structure imbedded in their material practices.

Many tribal communities are there in Tripura as well as in other parts of the country whose life and culture have not yet been studied. Since the first five year plan, after independence, many programmes have been taken up for developing the economic condition of the tribal people. In Tripura too a wide range of development programmes have been initiated by the government agencies for the development of the Molsoms, along with other tribes. The general understanding is that the benefits of these programmes are swallowed in the middle of the way and do not reach the target groups. One of the objectives of the present work has been to make an assessment of the tribal development programmes undertaken in the area of my study.

Since their emergence as a community the Molsoms, like all other tribes, had the problem of order. Over the ages and generations these communities have developed their own method to resolve the inter-personal quarrels and inter-group disputes relating to sex behaviour, land management and so on. Every tribal community therefore has its own authority structure and a set of norms, customs, and mode of punishment attached to it. The tribal authority structure has developed independent of the tribal kingdoms. But the rules, regulations and institutions require adjustments with the changing social, economic and political contexts. The introduction of the democratic processes, and the Panchayati Raj in particular, the tribal communities living

in remote places now get the opportunity to actively participate in the larger political processes. As a consequence it may be possible that many of the functions of the tribal panchayats have been taken over by the Panchayati Raj institution. Apart from drawing an account of the traditional panchayat, its constitution and functions, I have tried to see how the traditional tribal panchayat copes with the challenges thrown out by the Panchayati Raj institution and what adaptive changes it makes in the process.

An important component of an ethnographic account has to be the study of social organisation or the social structure, i.e., the way the community is constituted with its major groups and institutions. In order to have an idea of the social organisation of the Molsoms I have studied their family in terms of its structure and functions, the kinship structure and the functioning of the kinship networks, a study of the genealogy, the clans, and the marriage practices.

The unique and unknown areas of tribal religion have always drawn the attention of the anthropologists. Although the Molsoms mostly claim to be Hindu, if asked about their religion, and they are also recorded as Hindu in the official documents, one has to examine the nature of their religious beliefs and practices in order to understand what kind of Hinduism they practice. A discussion of the unique features of the religious practices of the Molsoms will reveal whether these can be located in-between Hinduism and animatism.

An important part of the present work has been the study of the *rites de passage* and the elements of social control involved thereupon. It has been fascinating for me to go through the various significant ceremonies that the Molsoms perform with all seriousness and integrity at various stages of their life, i.e., at the time of birth, in childhood, attainment of puberty, at marriage, and till the time of death.

Man has never been satisfied with a situation which ensures only survival he has always looked for a good living, a better living. Amidst impoverishment and daily struggle for survival all tribal communities have found time to build up a strong colourful culture of music, dance and games. They practice all these with a sense of collective solidarity and collective participation, and they have programmes for the people across all age-

groups. It is but natural that their economic life, their moments of sorrow and happiness will be reflected in these cultural forms and the Molsoms will have some degree of resemblance with other tribal communities in these cultural practices. I have tried to look into some of these areas while studying the music, dance forms and games of the Molsoms.

The economic and cultural activities of a community are closely interconnected. Hence, to implement any new scheme or to frame any scheme for developing the tribal communities, it is of great value to have knowledge about the life and culture of the smaller unknown communities concerned. Besides Tripura, other states of North Eastern India and some other parts of India have been facing disturbances so far its communal harmony and ethnic relation is concerned. And among the other causes, the lack of knowledge about the socio-cultural aspects of a community by the others is one of the major problems. Because unless we have knowledge about the life and culture of the tribal or other communities, we shall not able to have a strong bond of harmony among the people of various communities of our nation.

In Tripura, broadly, there are two groups of people, the tribals and the non-tribals who constitute the total population of the state. The non-tribals constitute about 69 percent of the total population and mainly reside in the plain lands which constitute about 40 percent of total areas of the state. The tribal population constitute about 31 percent of the total state population and mainly reside in the hill areas which constitute about 60 percent of the total areas of the state. In regard to the relation between the tribals and the non-tribals of the state, it was very much friendly and cooperative. A close interaction was prevailing between the people of two groups. Before it acceded to the Indian Union on 15th October 1949, the Tripura had been ruled by the tribal kings. The most of the non-tribal subjects belonged to the Bengali linguistic group and practiced Hinduism and Muslim religion. So far as the record goes, the demographic concentration of the tribal and the non-tribal subjects were, all most similar in the first part of the 20th century. In the Census of 1901 the percentages of the tribals and the non-tribals were 52.82 and 47.18 respectively. But the rate of increase of the non-tribal subjects were higher. Thus as early as in 1931 the population of

the non-tribal subjects became majority. As per 1931 Census, the percentage of the non-tribal subjects were 50.31 and that of the tribals were 49.69. But that was not a question so far relation between the tribal and the non-tribal was concerned. In fact such increase in the demography of the non-tribal subject had no detrimental impact on the economic arena of the tribal subjects due to the fact that the non-tribal subjects were mostly settled on the plain areas and most of the tribal subjects did not know the utility of those stretches of land for agricultural purpose since they had been practicing shifting cultivation on the slopes of the hill at that time. But later having adopted the methods of settled cultivation the tribal subjects gradually started utilising the plain lands. As such the production in the plain land cultivation is higher than that of land extensive shifting cultivation, and as a result a good number of the tribal subjects took to settled cultivation and in course of time all most all plain lands, a large part of which remained fallow earlier, came under cultivation. The increased land-man ratio in the hills also made the tribals disinterested in shifting cultivation due to cut-down in Jhum-cycle for the paucity of new fallow jhumable hill slopes. It was than a major problem to rehabilitate the tribals, who adopted the technique of settled cultivation, on the plain land because the land in the plains had already been captured by the non-tribals even before 1947. Unless we keep this historical reality in mind we would not be able to understand the present tribal-nontribal conflict in the state in a proper light. An understanding of the life and culture of the Molsoms would also help understand the shaping of ethnic sentiment in the tribal mind.

The present ethnographic account of the Molsoms of Tripura has been arranged in the following sections:

1. Land and people of Tripura; the Molsoms of Tripura; the origin of the tribe and its demographic profile.
2. Settlement pattern, house types and food habits of the Molsoms.
3. The economic life of the Molsoms.
4. The social organisation of the Molsoms.
5. The authority structure
6. Rites of passages

7. The religious life
8. Music, Dance and Games among the Molsoms.

Each of these sections will constitute a separate chapter. Besides portraying a descriptive account of what I have seen in my first hand observation in various aspects of the society and culture of the Molsoms I have tried to put across the possible interpretation of what I have seen and tried to place in an analytical frame the changes the Molsoms are experiencing in all these areas.

A brief review of literature

In the existing literature no in-depth study on the life and culture of the Molsoms is available. However, some studies are there on the life and culture of some other tribes of Tripura and the tribes of other North Eastern States of India from which we can have some idea of the socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of the life of various tribes of the area.

The book by J. Shakespear titled *The Lusai Kuki Clans* (1912) deals with various aspects of the life and culture of the Lushais and Kukis. In six chapters, the author provides valuable information on the habitats, appearance and physical characteristics, history, affinities, dress and ornaments, artifacts, economy, domestic life, laws and customs, religion, folklore, language and so on. This can be termed as one of the classical ethnographic account of the tribal life in the region.

Kaliprasanna Sen (ed), 1926, *Rajmala* (in Bengali)(1926) is one of the most useful and oft quoted document history of the Tripura kings and their subjects. Original Rajmala was written by Sri Kaliprasanna Sen in the year 1458. He was patronised by the King Dharmamanikya. Subsequent additions have been published updating the original Rajmala. Some doubt have been raised by the scholars like Suniti Kumar Chattarjee and D.C Sarkar about the historical value of the documents produced in Rajmala. However, descriptions of some of the tribal communities of the Tripura are available in the document.

The book *Udaipur Bibarani* (in Bnegali) by Dutta Brajendra (1930) gives some valuable information about Udaipur, the then capital of Tripura. It provides us the important fact that the first Bengali immigration from the

then British India took place in that part under the direct patronage of the Tripura kings. The early batch of Bengali immigrants who were adept in settled cultivation, or belonged to some artisan castes like the barber, washerman and so on were given settlement in Hirapur, Joshpur, Rangamati and some other nearby villages.

Deb Burman's *Census Biborani* (1933)" (in Bengali) mainly deals with an analysis of the information taken from the 1931 Census of the state of Tripura. Some important matters like demography of different tribes, statistical information on the religion, language etc. are available in the book, which are of vital importance for understanding the demographic profile of the state at that time.

In *Economic Problems of the Jhumias of Tripura* (1969) J.B. Ganguly gives an economic profile of the jhum cultivating tribes of Tripura. The book mainly deals with the traditional agricultural methods namely shifting cultivation of the tribals of Tripura. In this study, Dr. Ganguly analysed the economic aspects of the Tripura tribals highlighting the relation between the production and the consumption pattern of the tribals.

B.P Misra's study on the *Socio-economic Adjustments of the Tribals — case study of Tripura Jhumias* (1976), conducted mainly on the socioeconomic adjustment of the Tripura tribals in the settlement colonies of the Tribal Welfare Department of the Government of Tripura, discusses the problems the tribal communities in the state were facing while trying to adjust with the requirements of settled cultiva ion. The book also gives information on the life and culture of some Tripura tribes.

Saigol's book *Tripura — Its History and Culture* (1978) provides information about the royal history of Tripura kings and the cultural heritage of the royal palace and also gives an account of the condition of the tribal subjects. The book gives some case studies related to the culture and economic status of the Tripura tribes. The book based on the personal experience of the author who worked as a high official in the state.

Bhattacharjee, in study of the *Jamatias of Tripura* (1983), traces down the origin of the Jamatias, and provides valuable information about their relation with the kings of Tripura, their religious practices, chieftainship, economy, settlement patterns etc. According to the study the Jamatias

were one of the *kokborak* speaking tribe that had served in the army of the successive kings of Tripura. In another study (1983) Bhattacharjee has collected information on the Kolois - a *kokborak* speaking tribe of Tripura. The Kolois have been classified as a sub-groups of the Halams. The latter is of a Kuki-chin linguistic origin. The Kolois are not listed as a scheduled tribes in Tripura. However they get the government facilities equally with the other scheduled tribes of the state since they are considered as a sub-group of the Halams.

Bose, in his book titled *Glimps of Tribal Life in North-East India* (1980), has dealt with some tribes of Assam (of early thirties). The volume gives an analysis of the dual organisation in Assam, cross-cousin marriage, lavirate, tri-clan and marriage classes in Assam, the Nokram system of the Garos and the laws of inheritance found among the Garos. The book also gives an analysis of the geo-political background of the North East India and the descent system prevailing among the Dimasas. Though the title of the book is "Glimpse of Tribal Life in North East India", the study is limited only on some tribes of Assam.

Chaudhury , in his book *The Khasi Canvas* (1983) gives a social and cultural account of Khasis living in some of the states of the North East. The Khasis constitute one of the scheduled tribes in Tripura. They are mainly concentrated in Meghalay state of North East India and are well known for their matriarchal pattern of society. Chaudhury, in his book, has given an in-depth information and analysis of the Khasi metriliny, their traditional religion, indigenous games, economy, social customs, ceremonies etc. Among the tribes of North East India, the technology of iron smelting could be found only among the Khasis — the book informs. Besides, the indigenous methods of irrigation on hill tops developed by the Khasis, have been narrated in the book. The book titled *The Tribes of Tripura,* by Deb Burman S.B.K (1983) gives some primary information on nineteen scheduled tribes of the Tripura. The book mainly deals with the sub-groups of and the interrelationships between these scheduled tribes. In the chapter on the Halams the Mulsums (Molsoms) are included as one of the sub-groups of the Halams. It seems that the author is not prepared to accept the Molsoms as a distinct tribe.

Deb and Lahiri wrote a book on *Lusai Custom and Ceremonies* in 1982. This book deals with the customs and ceremonies of the Lushais of Mizoram. Social organisations of the Lushais, religious practices, traditional political organisations etc. have been discussed in the book. The Lushais are also found in Tripura and are considered as one of the scheduled tribes of the state. Though, there is no reference , in the book, to the Lushais of Tripura, yet we find some information about the life and culture of the Lushais who are also known as the Mizos.

Dutta in his book *Tripurar Lushai Kukider Etikatha* (in Bengali), (1983) portrays the interrelationship that historically developed among the Lushais, the Kukis, the Tripura kings and the British rulers. This book also gives an account of the battle that took place between the kings of Tripura, the British rulers and the Kukis in the year 1777.

Gan Chaudhury, in his book *The Riangs of Tripura* (1983), gives some information regarding the environment, ecological and natural phenomena of Tripura along with the socio-cultural and politico-religious aspect of the Riangs of the Tripura.

Sailo's book *The Bongcher* (1995) is one of the recent book on the culture and history of the Bongcher tribe of Tripura. The study gives information about the origin, migratory roots, religion, traditional self government, folktales and some other aspects of the Boncher tribe of Tripura. The Bongchers , as the study reveals, belong to the Kuki-chin linguistic origin. They migrated to Tripura from the Lilichamphai area of the present Mizoram. Their migratory roots, as per the study, have got some similarities with that of the Molsoms of Tripura.

S.B. Saha's *Socio-economic Survey of the Noatia Tribes* (1986) gives information about the culture and economy of the Noatia — a *kokborak* speaking tribe of the Tripura. According to the study, the Noatias have similar cultural and social practices with that of the Tripuris. They are, in fact, a part of the group of the tribes which have newly assimilated into the Tripuri communities of the state.

Tribes of North-East India, a collection of twenty one essays edited by S. Sengupta (1994) cover the biological and cultural perspectives of some tribes of North East India. The book opens with an article with a brief

description on some tribal groups of each of the North Eastern states. While giving description on the Tripura tribals. K.K.Kar, in his article entitled "The Tribes of North-East India : An Overview", has observed that, of the various tribes and clans (of Tripura tribals) only the Durlongs, who came from eastern Burma some three centuries ago via the Mizoram Hills and now confined to Kailashahar, claim to be indigenous to Tripura. But our experiences do not conform to this observation. The Darlongs in Tripura are not treated as a separate tribe so far as the official records are concerned. They, however, are considered as a section of the Kukis in Tripura. Their name, in fact, is not included in the list of the scheduled tribes in Tripura although they get the facilities meant for the scheduled tribes since they are treated as one of the sub groups of the Kukis. The old Darlongs use the term Kuki after the surname (i.e Darlong Kuki).

According to some official documents published by the state government (Menon 1975: 150; Deb Burman 1983: 8; Dutta 1980: 1, 58) the Halams are in fact a part of the Kukis who were in constant conflict with the ruling princely family of Tripura. One section of this tribe surrendered themselves to the princely family, who incidentally belonged to the dominant Tripuri tribe. That section of the Kukis later came to be known as Halams. These documents, however, do not provide any information as to when this had happened.

Ramaprasad Dutta's book (1980) gives an account of the battles between the Kukis on the one hand and the princely family an the British on the other, which occurred around the year 1777 (ibid:11). Hence we can presume that the Halams came to be known as a separate tribe during this period.

It is not clear as to what is the exact number of sub-tribes among the Halams. The Tripura District Gazetteer (Menon 1975) notes that the Halams had twelve sub-groups which later split into sixteen. However, in another government publication (Deb Burman 1983) it is mentioned that the Halams have seventeen sub-groups. In both the books the Molsoms are included as a sub-group. The above information reveal how little is actually known about the Halams.

There are, however, some significant studies which provide useful information on the society and economy of some tribal groups in the state. These are studies by the J.B.Ganguly (1969); B.P.Misra (1976) ; S.B.K.Deb Burman (1983); P.N.Bhattacharjee 1983) and some other scholars. In addition, there are some studies and records in Bengali which also provide information on the tribes of the state. The two more important sources are:(1) history of the Tripura royal families known as Rajmala and (2) Ramaprasad Dutta's work on the Lushais and the Kukis (1980). The original Rajmala was written by Kaliprasanna Sen in 1458. He was patronized by Raja Dharmamanikya. Subsequent additions have been made updating the Rajmala. Ramaprasad Dutta's (1980) work on the Luhsais and the Kukis also throw light on the origin of these two tribes . As mentioned earlier, the present study is the first of its kind on the Molsoms of Tripura. The other studies have been used while comparing ethnographic data on the Molsoms and other tribal groups.

Fieldwork

Since no comprehensive study was available on the Molsoms I had to depend almost exclusively on the primary data collected through an intensive fieldwork. At first I did a survey on the location of the Molsom villages. Inquiries were made at various Block offices, Tribal welfare Offices and with some knowledgeable persons to locate these villages. I also inquired with the Molsoms of one village as to where the other Molsom could be found and what would be the possible population composition of these villages. After compiling the data which I collected from the government sources and from the Molsoms, I found that most of the Molsom villages were situated in different parts of the South Tripura and North Tripura districts with larger concentration in the former district. There were roughly forty Molsom villages detected in the state and I visited eighteen of them to finally select nine villages for the purpose of an intensive study. I did this on the basis of the geographical location and population concentration of the villages. Of these nine villages, five were situated in interior hill areas and four were closer to some small townships.

At first, in November 1983 , I went to a few of the market places where the weekly markets which are locally known as *haat*, were held . I felt that this was safer because people from different villages gather at these *haats*. I made contact with some Molsom who had come to these *haats* and I spoke to them about my proposed study. I found that most of these people showed interest regarding my study and they invited me to stay in their villages. In fact these people were very hospitable. They even assured me that no harm would be done to me. What was surprising here was that I had no previous acquaintance with these people. I met them in the *haats* for the first time. Yet, they were hospitable. The simplicity and warmth that the Molsoms had shown to me at the first meeting gave me a lot of confidence in undertaking the fieldwork. It may be mentioned here that while selecting the villages I had been advised by the officials of the Tripura Police department not to visit some of the villages in the interior areas because of the risks involved. At the time of my fieldwork, as stated earlier, the rural areas of Tripura were disturbed as a result of the ongoing extremist movement by a tribal organisation. But I did not always pay heed to their advice and fortunately I did not have to face any problem from the extremists in particular. All I had told the people whom I met in the *haats* was that I wanted to write a book on their life and culture and they offered me all cooperation. In fact I had selected three of such trouble prone villages for intensive study.

I went to Raipasa Molsom Bari in the first part of 1984. I stayed there for ten days to get some primary information on their life and culture and at the same time to build up some sort of rapport with the villagers. During that period I was residing in a township called Ambasa which is situated about seven kilometers away from Raipasa. I was unable to get accommodation at Raipasa then. I used to visit the village in the morning and return in the afternoon. Initially, I had absolutely no idea about the life and culture of the Molsoms. So I used this opportunity to familiarise myself with their life style. I was also able to make arrangement for my stay in the village for fieldwork in the next phase. Unfortunately, when I planned to return to the village for my intensive study, a riot occurred in the village and its surroundings. Some criminals from the non-tribal population around this village attacked the tribals to

take revenge for an earlier attack on some Bengalis in Ambasa by some members of the TNV. (Tripura National Volunteers) The leader of the TNV, Mr. Bijoy Hrankhol, incidentally was from a village close to Raipasa. The main victims of that riot were the Molsoms. Raipasa Molsom Bari was a deserted village as all its inhabitants fled to the interior forests for safety. Their houses had been squandered and many were burnt. A few Molsoms were killed. Under that circumstances I decided not to cover the Raipasa Molsom Bari for the collection of quantitative data. I then made a pilot survey of some neighboring Molsom villages and decided to cover Patabiri Molsom Bari, Dhanchera Molsom Bari and Shibbari. After selecting three other Molsom villages I came back to Udaipur sub-division of South Tripura district to begin an intensive study there. I left Ambasa for the time being because the situation in Molsom villages at Ambasa was still tense as the memory of the terrible riot was still haunting their mind. However, the circumstances became normal when I came back to Ambasa after conducting studies on the villages of South Tripura.

In South Tripura, I started my study from Kalabon Molsom Bari, a village situated near Tulamura bazar of Udaipur sub-division which was consisted of forty-two households . At that time I was residing at Udaipur and was visiting the village every morning and returning in the evening. At first I began my study by having conversations with the elders about their life, customs, norms and ceremonies. These people were very interested in telling me all whatever I wanted to know. In this regard it should be mentioned here that the little knowledge and experience which I gathered from Raipasa regarding their life and culture helped me in establishing rapport with the people of Kalabon Molsom Bari rather easily. The Molsoms in this village were especially excited that I was going to write a book about them. After a week, I was able to make an arrangement for my stay in the village. I then was also able to collect information in a more friendly and homely atmosphere. Soon I found that the village people started to refer to me as Itihas Babu, that is, a person who writes history. I, of course, took care to check whatever I was told were facts and not exaggerations. It was possible that since they were conscious of the purpose of my visit, they would give a different picture of their activities. Therefore I cross-checked everything I was told with others in

the village and also in other villages to find out how reliable my information was. I was able to establish a better rapport with the youths because of my interest in music. I learnt some of their songs which I used to sing to them. This made me more friendly with them. They were especially impressed at the fact that an outsider and a non Molsom could sing their songs. I also participated in their activities by trying to dance with them in their ceremonies. In this way I was able to get closer to them and soon a close bond of friendship grew with many of them.

I did not know their language though I tried to pick up some words. Most of the Molsoms knew Bengali and I had no problem in communicating with them. In this sense most of the Molsoms are bilingual as they speak their own language as well as the local dialect of Bengali. I compiled a glossary of Molsom words with their English equivalents which is added at the end of this dissertation.

I stayed for one and a half months in Kalabon Molsom Bari. I gained a lot from my stay there as this is the village from where I collected the basic data. I could use this as the basis of my study in the other villages. Since I had developed close relationship with the village folk they had no hesitation in allowing me to attend many of their ceremonies. One of those was the puberty initiation ceremony. Usually no outsider is allowed to witness this ceremony as this is a highly private affair. I was interested in witnessing one such ceremony as this would give me some first hand knowledge.

I was so far being given only descriptions of this ceremony which is an important rite of passage among the Molsom. Initially there was some hesitation in allowing me entry but after a few weeks of my stay I was not only allowed to witness one such ceremony but was also permitted to photograph it. The people requested me not to take photograph of the girl when she was unclothed. I respected their sentiments.

Sri Swaran Kumar Molsom of Kalabon Molsom Bari one day invited me for dinner at his house which I attended with a great deal of curiosity. Some elderly Molsoms of the village were also present there. They offered me *rakzu*, the local alcoholic drink which I, along with them, enjoyed since it was one of their customary ways to honour a guest. In that gossip

session Sri Swaran Kumar told me, ' Dada, as such you are writing our cultural history, you should know one of our social ceremonies about which we generally do not make any discussion with any non-Molsom person since this is a very private matter to our community". After that, as an exception to their established practice, they gave me a detailed description of the puberty initiation ceremony and also the permission to witness one such ceremony.

During interaction with the Molsoms in their villages I noticed that they were giving some special importance and attention to me based on their understanding that I had a keen interest to know about their culture. As they reported none had made such an attempt before. In this regard I remember one incidence that took place at a time when I started writing the dissertation. One day I met some Molsom youth at Agartala who had came to the Tribal Welfare Department for some official works. In course of discussion they informed me that Khoser would be worshiped the next week (in July 1985). I decided to witness the ceremony. And accordingly I started for Ḳalabon Molsom Bari of Udaipur. Unfortunately I could not reach the village a day before the day of worship. It was the worship-day and it was known to me that during the day of Khusher worship no outsider, not even the villager who may have gone out for some business, is allowed to enter the village, because that is taken as a serious offense. Seating on a stone under a tree just outside the village I was waiting and thinking what to do. Some children of the village saw me and reported to other village people. After a few minutes, some young men of the village came to me but stood inside the village boundary. Seeing them I stood up, narrowed the gap and apologised that I failed to come in time. They requested me to wait there and went back to the village. After about half an hour they came back and informed me that they had discussion with the village priest and elderly persons who specially considered the case and allowed me to enter the village on condition that I pay a fine of twenty-five bottles of *rakzu* and five hens. I entered the village and conveyed my sincere thanks to the village priest and others. Just before making payment for the fines imposed to me, there was another round of discussion between the youths and aged persons. The youths were arguing that since I was to record their culture I should not be

made to pay such a "heavy fine". At last, it was decided that only an amount of Rs.50 would be taken from me for *rakzu* and hens. I paid the same accordingly and observed the ceremony freely.

After collecting information on their life and culture—their rites, rituals, ceremonies. customs etc. I started conducting the household census. I framed a schedule which sought information on the household composition, sex, clan, religion, occupation, level of education, land holding, pattern of land use, type of marriage, age at marriage, place of birth etc. Some of the questions sought information on more than one generations, the present and past generations. After completing this I decided to take up one more from the selected villages and followed the similar sequence of techniques to study it.

I collected qualitative data in the initial stage of my fieldwork because I thought that the village people would be less interested to respond to the objective type questions like how many children you have, how much landed property you posses, in which class do your children read in etc, which were a part of my census schedule. However, they given me all such information after a period of twenty/twenty-two days when I was familiar to them in a better friendly atmosphere.

The next village I went to was Manithang Bari of the same subdivision which had thirty-eight households. My visit to Manithang Bari was followed by visits to Thali Bari (thirty-three households) , Atharobhola Boro Bari (forty households) , and Raia Molsom Bari (thirty-two households) villages. I spent about a month in each of these four villages. My experiences in Kalabon Molsom Bari made me familiar with the Molsoms and hence it did not take much time for me to establish rapport with the people in these villages. In fact the people of these villages were astonished when I explained to them some of their culture traits. They wondered how an outsider knew something about their culture. For instance, when I asked a person what clan he belongs to—whether Deorai, Mapu, Achep or so on, they gave me strange looks. At the same time, however, they were glad that I knew the name of their clans. Thus in the villages of South Tripura I conducted studies in a friendly and favorable atmosphere. I gathered same sort of experience during my fieldwork in the villages

of North Tripura (present Dhalai) district. In Kamalpur sub-division of North Tripura district, in the second phase of my visit, at first I went to Patabiri Molsom Bari, which was followed by visits to Dhanchera Molsom Bari and Sib Bari. I had to finally drop the study of the Raipasa Molsom Bari the first Molsom village where I had been to, since intercommunity riots took a heavy toll on the people there. Most of them had abandoned their houses and settled elsewhere because they were under constant threat of attacks from non-tribals. The government was trying to ensure peace and encourage the people to return to their houses. But during the time of my fieldwork this process was going on. I therefore could cover three of the selected villages especially for quantitative data. I however, managed to collect some qualitative information from the aged persons of that village.

I conducted the household census in eight villages and collected qualitative information on different aspects of their lives from nine villages. Most of my information in these eight villages matched with what I had collected in Kalabon Molsom Bari. There was some variations on songs especially in love songs. The content of these songs were different though the tunes were the same. There are of course differences in some aspects of the quantitative data which I collected from the eight villages.

I started writing the draft of my dissertation after the analysis of the data. I made a few trips to these villages again in order to cross-check some points or to clear some doubts.

The terrorist activities of the outlawed TNV (Tripura National Volunteers) had started in the month of June 1980, which is popularly known as *juner danga*. Though at the outset, I was advised by the officials of the Tripura police department not to visit the tribal village of interior areas because of the risk involved. I, fortunately, did not face any problem from the TNVs. On the contrary, through middlemen, they given me the assurance that their would be no problem from them if I resume fieldwork since it was a purely academic study and it had got nothing to do with politics. They were pleased that their life and culture would be highlighted through my study. The TNVs problem came to an end in the year 1988, after the Rajib-Rankhol (Bijoy Rankhol : president TNV) Chukti (agreement). After

1993 the situation deteriorated remarkably when another extremist group namely NLFT (National Liberation Front of Tripura) started terrorist activities with much more vigour. Besides killing they started kidnapping the civilians with an intention to earn money and spread terrorism. With a similar intention they started to collect annual / monthly 'taxes' from the employees and common people of some interior areas. Under the circumstances, it become a major problem, especially for the people belonging to townships, to visit interior tribal villages. It was therefore almost impossible for me to visit the villages selected for the present study. However, through an intimate interaction with the Molsoms, which was possible because of the fieldworks since 1984, a strong bond of friendship had grown with the inmates of the sample Molsom villages. The village people when visited my office or residence informed me about the condition of the villages and their inmates. I also paid trips, although occasionally, to some of my sample villages as and when I got an opportunity. But since the last part of 1997 the conditions deteriorated to such an extent that even my friends in Molsom villages were not confident in welcoming me to their villages. No Molsom was supporting the activities of the NLFT yet people of the sample villages requested me not to visit their villages because of the deteriorating inter-ethnic relations. With deep sense of regret they said that the NLFT extremists were constantly threatening those who had been in touch with the non-tribals.

Chapter - 2

The Land and the People of Tripura

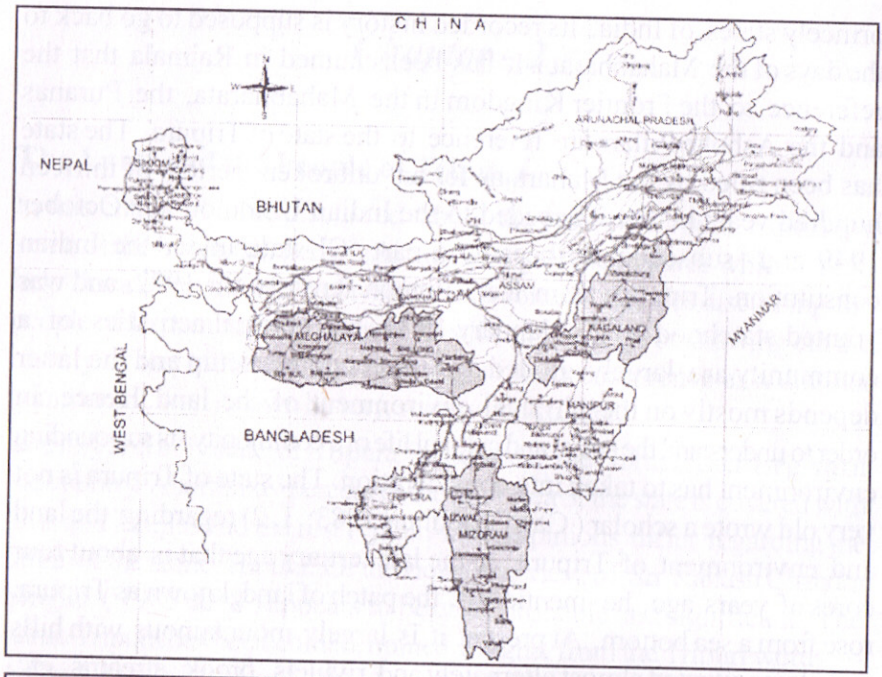
In this chapter I have discussed about the state of Tripura, especially some of the historical, geographical, demographic features which would help "locate" my problem of research in a context. Besides discussing the people of Tripura in general I have specifically focused on drawing out the history of the Molsoms and the story of their emergence as a distinct community, with its own history, society and culture.

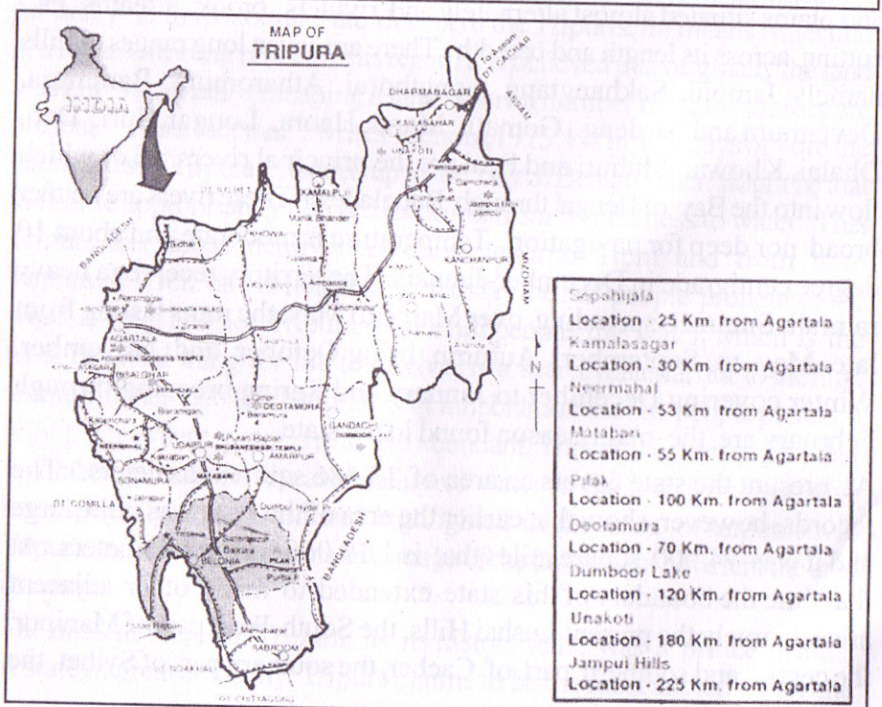
The tiny and hilly state of Tripura is situated in the North Eastern region of the country. About sixty percent of the total area of the state is covered with hills and jungles and the rest is plain-land. Opinions differ regarding the origin of the name Tripura. Of the views, the view of Sri Kailash Chandra Singha (1985 ed :8) appears to be quite probable and significant. The name Tripura has been coined, opined Singha, from the Tripuri words — *tui* and *pra*. In Kokborak, the dialect of the Tripuris, *tui* means water and *pra* means meeting point. In this regard it is believed that originally the land was known as *tuipra* meaning a land where a number of water sources are present. " It is a fact that", writes Menon (1975:1) "in the days of yore the boundaries of Tripura extended up to the Bay of Bengal when might be that the name appropriately derived its origin from its nearness to water. This Tripura has subsequently been corrupted into Tipra and from it to Tripura. It is relevant to note that even today the hill people pronounce the word as tipra and not Tripura. To the hill people, the water, which is the most essential thing for life to survive, is a scarce material due to the high altitude of their habitat. Naturally, for inhabitation the hill people prefers a hilly place where water is near and abundant. This is why amongst other favorable conditions the availability of water in the locality might have been specially considered and highlighted in the case of settlement in Tripura and subsequently this advantage of the land might have lent the area its name.

The present state of Tripura, as its history tells, was a princely state. A state of great antiquity, Tripura claims to be the most ancient of all the

princely states of India. Its recorded history is supposed to go back to the days of the Mahabharata. It has been claimed in Rajmala that the reference to the Frontier Kingdom in the Mahabharata, the Puranas and the Ashoke Pillars are reference to the state of Tripura. The state has been ruled by the Maharajas for an unbroken period of thirteen hundred years before it acceded to the Indian Union on 15th October 1949 and subsequently became a part 'C' state under the Indian constitution. Tripura was, in fact, a union territory till 1972, and was granted statehood on 21st January 1972 .The cultural activities of a community are largely guided by its economic setup and the latter depends mostly on the physical environment of the land. Hence, in order to understand the social and cultural life of a community, its surrounding environment has to taken into consideration. The state of Tripura is not very old wrote a scholar (Gan Chaudhuri 1983: 1, 2) regarding the land and environment of Tripura. In the late tertiary age that is about four cores of years ago, he mentioned, the patch of land, known as Tripura, rose from a sea bottom. At present it is largely mountainous with hills and plains situated almost alternately and rivulets, brook, streams, etc. cutting across its length and breadth. There are seven long ranges of hills namely Jampui, Sakhangtang, Longthorai, Atharomura, Baramura, Devtamura and Sardeng. Gomati, Manu, Haora, Longai, Juri, Deo, Dhalai, Khowai, Muhuri and Feni are the principal rivers, all of which flow into the Bay of Bengal through Bangladesh. These rivers are neither broad nor deep for navigation. Temperature is moderate and about 10 degree centigrade in December-January. The territory receives a heavy rainfall. Summer spreading over March to May, the rains lasting from late May to September, Autumn bring October and November, Winter covering December to January and Spring breezing through February are the main season found in the state.

At present the state covers an area of 10,486 squire kilometers. The records, however, show that earlier the area of the state was quite large and it was 74,000 square miles that is 1,19,066 square kilometers. At that time the boundary of this state extended to many other adjacent areas, namely the present Lushai Hills, the South-West part of Manipur, the central and southern part of Cacher, the southern part of Sylhet, the





Sepahijala
Location - 25 Km. from Agartala
Kamalasagar
Location - 30 Km. from Agartala
Neermahal
Location - 53 Km. from Agartala
Matabari
Location - 55 Km. from Agartala
Pilak
Location - 100 Km. from Agartala
Deotamura
Location - 70 Km. from Agartala
Dumboor Lake
Location - 120 Km. from Agartala
Unakoti
Location - 180 Km. from Agartala
Jampui Hills
Location - 225 Km. from Agartala

southern part of Maimansing, the eastern part of Dhacca, Chakla Roshanabad of Comilla, the whole of Noakhali and Chittagang district of present Bangladesh (Singha 1985 :9). At present, three sides of the state are surrounded by Bangladesh covering a total international boarder of 845 kilometers and only by its north- eastern part the state is connected with the rest of the country through a part of the Cacher district of Assam, and the state of Mizoram.

Broadly, there are two groups of people, namely the tribals and non-tribals who constitute the population of the state. The tribal communities of the state have been classified, as per order of the President of India in 1956, into nineteen scheduled tribes. Among these tribals the Tripuris, the Reangs, the Noatias, the Halams, the Jamatias, the Lushais, the Kukis, the Chaimals, the Uchois and the Mogs have been residing in the state since long past. They together form the autochthonous group. The other tribes namely Garo, Munda, Oraon, Santal, Bhil, Bhutia, Lepcha, and Khasi have came later. The tribes like Bhutia and Lepcha came from Bhutan, Sikim and North Bengal; Garo and Khasi from Meghalaya; and the Bhil, Oraon, Santal and Munda from Orissa, Bihar, Madhyapradesh and West Bengal. The later four groups actually came only when tea plantation started on a commercial scale in the state in 1916-17 to work as plantation labour.

Among the autochthonous groups, the Tripuri, Noatia and Jamatia may be classified under a common group because a great degree of similarities are found in their life and culture. In fact the Noatia and Jamatia, as mentioned in the Tripura District Gazetteers (1975:148-155), originated from the Tripuris. On the other hand the tribes like Chaimal, Kuki, Lushai and Halam may be brought under a common group due to their having a number of similarities in culture. The Chaimal, Halam and Kuki, as stated in the above Gazetteer, follow the same culture. In fact the Chaimal and Halam are a branch of the Kukis. Those of the Kukis who had submitted to the Maharajas of Tripura came to be known as Halams. The Lushais also racially belong to the Kuki stock (Ibid: 150-158).

The Reang and Uchois believe that they have originated from a common ancestor. Basing on this belief they address each other as *takhuk*

which means brother. Besides, the life and culture of these two tribes are also, more or less, similar (Deb Burman 1986: 8). So the Reang and Uchoi may also be classified under a single group.

The non tribal communities of the state are mainly the Bengali Hindus as well as and Muslim, and the Monipuris — both Bisnupriyas and Methais. The majority of the tribal people have been residing in the hill areas whereas most of the non-tribals have settled down on the plains.

The Molsoms in Tripura

The name Molsom has been commonly recorded in government documents and census reports as Murchum or Mursum which is, in fact, a corrupted form of the original name. During the fieldwork for the present study, it has been found that the members of this community refer to themselves as Molsom. In fact some of the educated members were upset to find that the name has been corrupted in government records. Hence in this study I decided to retain their original name in order to honour their sentiment. In the census reports, except the 1931 census, the Molsoms were treated as one of the sub-tribes of the Halams and there was no exhaustive study on its sub-tribes. Therefore we do not find any information exclusively on the Molsoms from the census reports.

The Molsoms form a small minority of the tribal population in the state. In 1931 the total population of the Molsom tribe in the state was recorded to be 3499 of which 1817 were male and 1682 female. They were at that time concentrated in Udaipur, Amarpur, Sadar and Khowai Sub-divisions (Census 1931). Another idea of the Molsom population can be obtained from the language census of 1961 which recorded Mursum and Mulsum as two separate language groups. The census shows that there were 4486 (2356 male and 2130 female) people who spoke Mursum and 289 (153 male and 136 female) who spoke Mulsom (Menon 1975 : 408). This may of course be an understatement because it is likely that several Molsoms might not have recorded their language as Mursum or Mulsom. A comparative study of the 1931 census and the language census of 1961 shows that there was an increase of only 1276 people in the community during the period from 1931 to 1961, if we consider Mulsom and Mursom as one tribe. But there might have

been further increase in their population which had not been recorded. Since no datum is available after 1961 only an approximate estimation of the population of this community can be made. We have therefore tried to make this estimate based on the population of the villages which are predominantly inhabited by the Molsoms.

Table-1

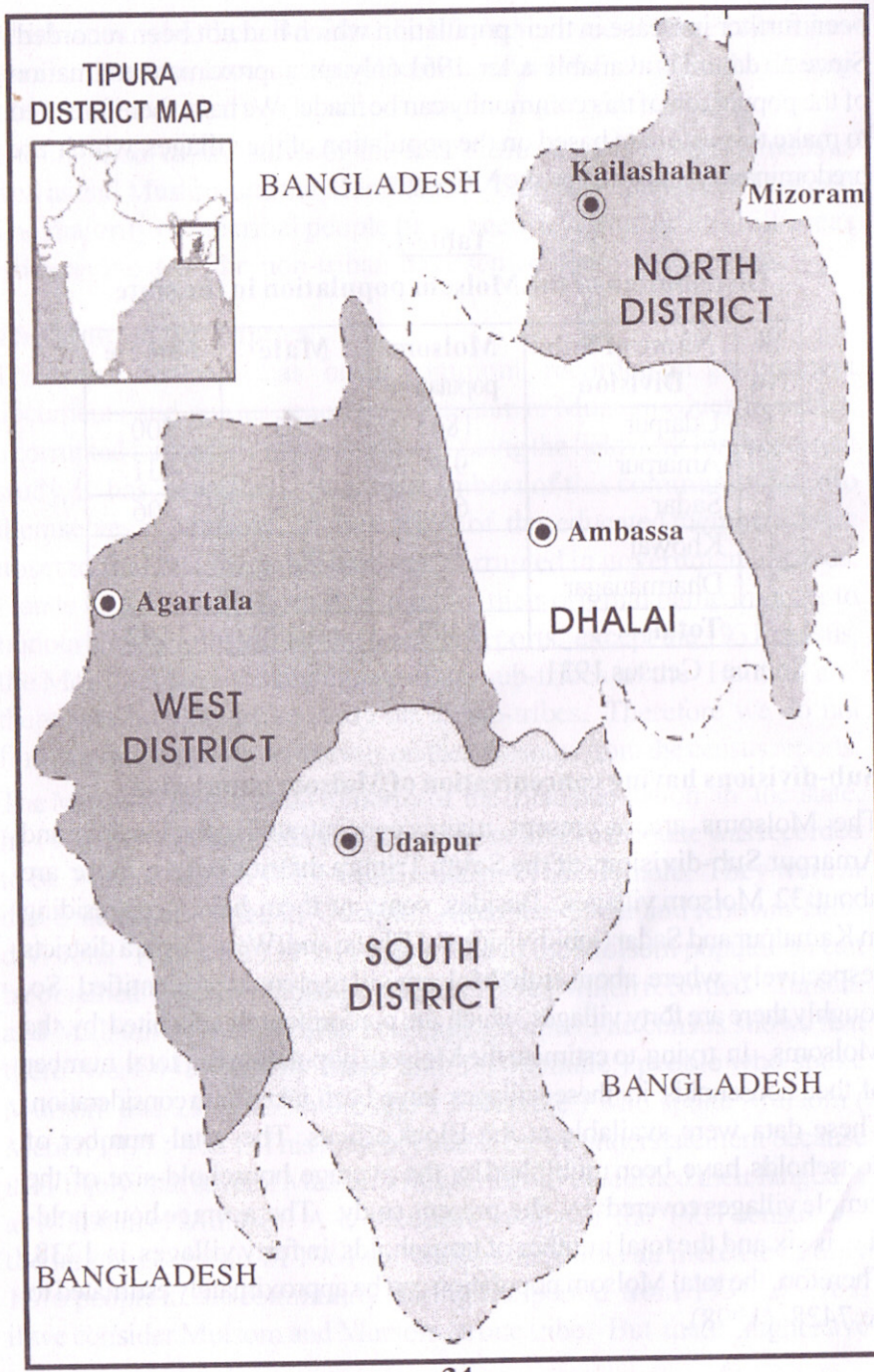
Distribution of the Molsom population in the state

Sl No	Name of Sub Division	Molsom population	Male	Female
1	Udaipur	1865	965	900
2	Amarpur	918	487	431
3	Sadar	626	320	306
4	Khowai	82	43	39
5	Dharmanagar	8	2	6
Total		**3499**	**1817**	**1682**

Source : Census 1931

Sub-divisions having concentration of Molsom population :

The Molsoms are, at present, mainly concentrated in the Udaipur and Amarpur Sub-divisions of the South Tripura district where there are about 32 Molsom villages. Besides, some of them have been residing in Kamalpur and Sadar Sub-divisions of Dhalai and West Tripura districts respectively, where about eight Molsom villages could be identified. So, roughly there are forty villages which are predominantly inhabited by the Molsoms. In trying to estimate the Molsom population the total number of their households in these villages have been taken into consideration. These data were available at the Block offices. The total number of households have been multiplied by the average household-size of the sample villages covered by the present study. The average household-size is six and the total number of households in forty villages is 1238. Therefore the total Molsom population can be approximately estimated to be 7428 (1998).


TIPURA
DISTRICT MAP
BANGLADESH
Kailashahar
Mizoram
NORTH
DISTRICT
Ambassa
DHALAI
Agartala
WEST
DISTRICT
Udaipur
SOUTH
DISTRICT
BANGLADESH
BANGLADESH

Nine villages were selected for field study, of which five namely, Kalabon Molsom Bari, Thali Bari, Raia Molsom Bari, Monithang Bari and Atharobhola Boro Bari are situated in Udaipur Sub-division and four namely Raipasa Molsom Bari, Patabiri Molsom Bari, Dhanchera Molsom Bari and Shib Bari are in Kamalpur Sub-division. Villages were selected on the basis of their geographical location, population size etc. Of the nine villages, five are located in the interior hill areas and four are closer to some townships. Attention has also given to the population size so that it would not be too small or too large. Another consideration which also had to be made, was the accessibility of the villages selected for the study. The terrorist activities of the outlawed T.N.V extremists had made it difficult to carry out field study in the interior villages and therefore only such villages were selected which had proximity to the main roads.

Quantitative data were collected with the help of a schedule and qualitative information were collected from some selected informants through prolonged interviews. Some case histories, genealogies etc. were also recorded. To get an insight into their rites and rituals I took part in many of their social functions, ceremonies such as marriage, puberty initiation which took place during my stay in the field.

The origin of the Molsoms

Paucity of the written documents on the background of the Molsoms makes it difficult to trace their origin. There is no recorded evidence to show where the Molsoms came from, how they came and when they settled in Tripura. All we know is that the Molsoms settled in Udaipur and Amarpur Sub-divisions of South Tripura several generations ago. Some of their families migrated to the Kamalpur Sub-division of North Tripura (present Dhalai) district about fifty years ago.

Perhaps one of the reasons why no one has studied this community separately is the general belief that it is a sub-group of the Halam. There are scant references to the Halams in the few discussions and studies that have been made on the Tripura tribes. The Molsoms are rarely referred to in these studies. This is so because of for granted that the views that they are a sub-group of the Halams. It is taken culture of the Molsoms

must be similar to that of the Halams and hence no separate study is required. Our findings show, on the contrary, that the little information that we have on the social life of the Halam is, in many cases , at variance with that of the Molsoms. We have not studied the Halam and therefore any comparative picture of these two groups can not be produced here. However, an attempt has been made to present a comparison between the different aspects of the social and cultural life of the Molsoms and those of the Halams wherever data were available on the latter.

There are two things that one has to consider while trying to fit the Molsoms into the Halam group. Firstly, whether there are adequate empirical bases by which one can equate the Molsoms with the Halams or is it based on common knowledge or popular belief. One has to raise this question because there is no clear knowledge even in the administrative records regarding what the sub-groups within the Halams are. Different government records, as stated earlier, give different pictures. The Molsoms are always included in all the records, yet doubt can be raised on this point because of the manner in which the sub-groups have been traced and grouped. Had these been fixed on the basis of certain criteria or had the Halam themselves been certain about the number of their sub-groups this confusion in the number of sub-groups would not have taken place.

The second point is how the Molsoms view the fact that they are a part of the Halams. Our findings show that a large number of Molsoms believe that they are an independent group with a separate language. It is found that a large number of Molsoms are unable to speak or even understand the language of the Halams. Similarly, they claim, the Halams too do not understand their language.

Another point worth mentioning here is that the earlier records show that the Halams were a part of the Kuki tribe which was in constant conflict with the ruling Tripuri tribe. The group which is known as Halams, as mentioned earlier, had broken away from the Kuki and accepted the sovereignty of the ruling family of Tripura. Even though the Halams broke away from their parent stock and became loyal to the royal family of the Tripura with which the Kukis were at enmity, there is nothing on record to show that the Halams did ever fight against their parent stock, the

Kukis. But there are several folk tales among the Molsoms which narrate their conflicts with the Kukis. These tales also try to establish the fact that the Molsoms were different from the Kukis. These points needed be dealt in greater details and perhaps when we have more ethnographic studies on the tribes of Tripura it will be possible to come to a conclusion. The scope of the present study is limited to the Molsoms and it is not possible here to provide any definite answer to the points raised. However, coming back to the question of the origin of the Molsoms, a folk tale is stated below which is very popular in this community. It deals with how they came to the state.

According to the folk tale, the Molsoms originally used to reside at Bolpuitang which was adjacent to the present Lushai hills. The particular village where they were residing consisted of ten hillocks from which the name Molsom was coined. In Molsom *mol* means hillock and *som* means ten, Molsom thus means the inhabitants of ten hillocks.

After coming from under the earth, their folk tale tells, the Molsom had been originally residing in the village named Arshiemkhosak which was situated at Bolpuitang. In this connection it may be mentioned here that the Molsom believe that all human beings were once under the earth. The area of Arshiemkhosak was so large that if any one traveled all over the village with a wet wrapper made of raw cotton which is locally known as *ponpui* then the wrapper would dry up by the time the walk was complete. In that village all the Molsoms were under the control of the community chief named Kamchikao. Along with other activities, the Kamchikao had to collect subscriptions for the annual Sangrak worship. Besides, he had to arrange for daily worship of Sangrak.

Once the Kamchikao was so busy in collecting subscription that for several days he had forgotten to arrange hens for the daily Sangrak worship. The Sangrak became angry since no hen was offered to him on all those days and in anger he left the village and went to the nearby hill. By that time an evil spirit named Rurangnu entered the village and started killing one person of the village every day. The villagers were unaware of this in the beginning. Due to the density of the population in the village, the loss of one person every day was unnoticed by them. They became

seared when one day the daughter of the Kamchikao was missing. Kamchikao ordered all the villagers to apprehend the person or thing responsible for the missing of his daughter. Every youth of the village then started searching day and night for the abductor. In the mean time Sangrak came to know, by the exercise of his supernatural power, all about the Ruregnu. He then got converted to a snake and entered into the village to punish the Ruregnu. But as soon as Sangrak entered the village in the form of a snake, the watch party killed it by cutting its head. The Sangrak however could save himself due to his supernatural power. The watch party then distributed the flesh of that snake among the villagers. An old widow got its head as her share which she kept above the hearth to dry it up for future consumption.

Next day early in the morning the snake-head cried out like a hen and then in clear human voice told the widow to flee elsewhere because an earthquake would destroy the village. The widow conveyed the forecast to all the villagers.

All people of the Arshiemkhosak, accordingly, fled the village that morning with their belongings. They had to cross a river on their way to another hillock. The river was too deep and its water too cold to cross. They made a rope-bridge with fiber of a local tree known as ronsoi and started crossing the river. The Kamchikao was supervising the safe movement of the villagers across the rope-bridge.

After all the villagers had crossed, the Kamchikao started crossing the bridge and as soon as he stepped on to the bridge, it broke down. He cried out for help. The widow then declared that it was because of the sin committed by the Kamchikao to Sangrak that he failed to cross the river. She advised him to worship sangrak by sacrificing a hen, which has lost no feather from its tail part and having long nails. The molsoms call such a hen *archangphir*, which means a mature hen. The widow then told the Kamchikao that only after worshipping the Sangrak he would be able to cross the river. After that the widow and other villagers left the place. They then reached a hill named Rhili Champhai where they settled down for some period.

The settlement area of Rhili Champhai of the Molsoms was also scattered over ten smaller hillocks and as per their saying, it was situated near present Mizoram. The area of the Rhili Champhai, as their folk tale tells, was consisted of a large quantity of plain areas on the hill tops. From Rhili Champhai they shifted to Rangdil of present Mizoram and then came to the Dumbur area of Amarpur sub-division of Tripura while searching for better jhum land. From Dumbur they got scattered to different parts of Amarpur and Udaipur sub-divisions.

It is interesting here to note that the hearsay relating to the migration of the Bongcher which is one of the sub- groups of the Halams especially the name of the original place of settlement, root of migration etc. are similar to those part of the folk tale of the Molsom narrated above. As per the Bongcher's hearsay, they were also inhabiting in Rilhi Champhai area of present Mizoram. Relhi, which is a big lake, lies to the east of Mizoram just within Burma and Champhai is one of the towns of Mizoram lying on the eastern side bordering Burma. Champhai has a good paddy land and is known as the granary of Mizoram. Reh lake also has good surrounding paddy fields (Sailo 1992 : 4).

From the Rehli Champhai the Bongchers, as per the hearsay, moved to the North West side of Mizoram The village they could trace was the Buarpui which is situated in the Lunglei district of Mizoram. During their migratory movement , according to the hearsay, at one place they crossed one deep river with bamboo rafts stringed together with jungle creepers. While some of them had crossed over the river, the jungle creepers got broken and the bamboo rafts capsized. Due to that mishap, some were left behind on the other side of the river and those who could cross the river proceeded further and settled on a nearby hill for some period (bid : 5).

So far as this record goes, the Molsoms and Bongchers are sub groups of the Halams. The Molsoms have, on the other hand, some folk tales which indicate to their relationship of enmity and rivalry with the Halams. The Bongcher too, as per their hearsay, had a hostile relationship with the Hmars. The Kukis themselves call them Hmar. According to a story narrated by them, when they were staying at Parsonship village under the control of their chief Kawrpuia, a war occurred with the Hmar or Kukis where the Bongchers were badly defeated and their chief was killed (Ibid : 5).

Chapter - 3

Settlement Pattern and House Type

The settlement pattern and house type of a community may depend on the ecological set-up, the availability of the necessary materials, the economic condition of the members and their necessities, and the available technology. Taken together, the settlement pattern and house types are the important components of the material culture and taste of the community. Such material culture and taste are created over generations and thus constitute a part of the community tradition. These aspects of material culture are never static; they change in tune with the changing ecological, economic and social set-up.

A Molsom village is generally set up on a hillock the top of which is more or less flat. Besides, a number of things are taken into consideration when a settlement area is chosen. The area, for instance, should be large enough to accommodate every households of a group; it should not be too densely forested and to be cleared up easily; water sources should be available nearby; it should not be far from *jhum* lands and so on. In the village the houses are generally constructed in two rows having a vacant space in the middle which is used as a path way. A traditional Molsom house is known as *chungin* . It is almost the same as that of other tribal communities of the state which is commonly known as *tang* . The *chungin* is generally constructed at five to eight feet height from the ground with wooden or bamboo pillars. The floor and walls are made of bamboo splits and the roof is thatched. There are two entrances to a *chungin* the front door and the back door, but no window is there. In front of each door there is a balcony which is also made of bamboo splits. The front balcony is used as a place for gossiping, weaving etc. and the back balcony is used to dry food grains. Sometime a bamboo made platform, locally known as *inchoor*, is constructed adjacent to the back balcony to dry food grains. In past a group consisting of four to six houses were connected with each other by bridges constructed between the back balconies of those houses. The inside of the house has only one room

which is of multipurpose use—used as bedroom, kitchen, store, drawing room etc. A mud platform is made at a corner, preferably near the back door of the floor of the house, where a hearth is made. The space under the floor of the house is protected with bamboos and bushes and is used as pigsty. The Houses, especially of the traditional *jhumia* villages, are temporary in nature and made for two / three years use.

At present there is a trend among the Molsoms to construct houses of permanent type, constructed with wooden pillars or mud-walls and built on the ground level. Windows are nowadays found in these houses and doors number, in some cases, more than two. The houses have generally more then one rooms and in most cases a separate house is made for kitchen. In some cases more then one bed rooms are made and, in few cases, more then one houses are constructed for a single household.

The community feeling very much come into play in the settlement pattern of the Molsoms. Usually they do not allow other tribes an entry into their own settlement area nor they settle down in the settlement area of other non-Molsom tribes. The Molsom mind-set that they prefer to live in relative seclusion from other communities and that they want to live all by themselves is nicely reflected in their settlement pattern.

I can cite one more illustration in support of the above point. In Tripura one of the important tribal development schemes is to build up tribal settlements in a compact area, which is officially known as Colony Scheme. In the Colony Scheme of the Tribal Welfare Department, a group of tribal families are given settlement in a compact area. Each of the family is provided ten Kanis of tilla land, Rs.25,000 in cash for implementing various scheme-components and the settlement is provided with some infra structural facilities like link-roads, drinking water sources like Mark-II tube well, water reservoirs, Cuchcha well ; Community hall, dwelling house etc. Considering the preference of the beneficiary and depending on the nature of provided land, agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry or fishery based schemes or a combination of these schemes is provided for the economic rehabilitation of the colony-settlers. Due to paucity of cultivable plain land, the scheme is, now-a-days, limited to Tilla land. In the year 1978-79 one such colony was established in East Khupilong *gaon sava* area of Udaipur

Sub-division of South Tripura District. A total of fifty families were selected of which twenty two families were Molsoms and the rest twenty-eight families were Jamatias.

Despite repeated persuasion of the officials of the Tribal Welfare Department, the Molsom beneficiaries were not constructing their dwellings in the new settlement area which was situated about three kilometers away from their original residential areas. Fortunately, all those Molsoms were from Manithang Bari, one of my sample villages. One day when I visited Manithang Bari, my Molsom friends informed me that as many as twenty-two families of their village were selected for the colony scheme. But they were not willing shift to the demarcated settlement areas of the colony since they will have to live alongside twenty-eight Jamatia families. They were apprehending that while living with the Jamatias they will not able to share the common settlement places since they had some significant cultural deference. While rejecting the idea of a mixed settlement the Molsoms put forward an alternative proposal. They said that if they be allowed to reside in their present village and be allowed to use the *tilla* lands provided to them for cultivation or for horticulture-based schemes. They also informed that the village Manithang Bari was on *khas* land. To know the opinion of the Jamatia beneficiaries I had a discussion with some of the Jamatia beneficiaries namely Sri Kashipada Jamatia, Jaleprasad Jamatia, Shibalal Jamatia, Kharan Hari Jamatia and some others regarding the sharing of common settlement area with the selected Molsom beneficiaries under the scheme. The Jamatias replied that they had no problem to share the common settlement areas. I conveyed the opinion of the Jamatia beneficiaries to the Molsoms. But the Molsoms firmly stuck to their decision and requested me to convince the government authority to allow them to use the present homestead areas for their settlement purposes so that they could avail the benefit of the scheme for which they had been selected.

I, as an employee of the Tribal Welfare Department, took up the matter with Sri Ranjit Kumar Deb Burma, the District Tribal Welfare Officer, South Tripura District and Sri K.V.Satyanarayan, the District Magistrate and Collector, South Tripura District. Both of them given me assurance that they would examine the government policy and guidelines and would

try to find a solution within the official norms. As per the government policy, the sub-divisional officers were only the implementing authority so far the colony scheme was concerned. The District Magistrate and Collector instructed the District Tribal Welfare Officer, South Tripura District and the Sub-divisional Officer, Udaipur, to resolve the problems of selected Molsom beneficiaries of the East Khupilong *jhumia* settlement colony. Both of them took initiatives to consider the preferences of the Molsom beneficiaries. From the documents of the settlement office it was confirmed that the settlement area of all the 38 households of Manithang Bari village was actually *khas* land. A meeting was held between the members of Village council, family heads and aged inmates and the District Tribal Welfare Officer, South Tripura District, and myself where an unanimous decision was taken that all the families would surrender their homestead possessions to the Tribal Welfare department and the latter then would arrange for redistribution of the land equally among the households without any discrimination. The remaining sixteen families who were not covered by the colony scheme would get benefit of other developmental scheme. Besides, the members of those sixteen families were to be engaged as labours in the works related to the development of infrastructural facilities for the village along with the colony-beneficiaries. The members of those sixteen families would use the infrastructural facilities created for the inmates of colony-scheme. After this the government accepted the demand of the Molsom beneficiaries of the East Khupilong Settlement Colony and implemented the colony scheme. The part of the colony with Molsom households was named Molsom Para and the part with Jamatia households as Jamatia Para.

The Molsoms were very sincere in implementing the provisions of the colony scheme and as a result this scheme was one of the few successful colony schemes in the state. I was keeping constant contact with the inmates of the Molsompara of the East Khupilong settlement colony so long as I was in Udaipur. I was in Udaipur from 1988 to the middle part of 1994. During that period I used to visit the Molsom villages of Udaipur Sub-division as and when I got an opportunity and my Molsom friends also were visiting me in my quarters as and when they came to Udaipur town. Their love and respect made me more dutiful to them. I tried to bring

changes in some of their bad practices like dependence on the quack and Awchais for treatment and to some other traditional practices. In Molsompara (Manithang Bari) a quak used to render medical facilities. He, in fact, was a cheat. He used to give some pain killing medicine, paracitamol, vitamin tablets or syrup to all most all types of patients. I found him injecting distill water in the name of medicine. I disclosed the matter to my Molsom friends and convinced them about the bad effect of getting treatment from such quack and advised them to avail medical facilities from the nearest Government health centers or Hospital. I also arranged for frequent visit of the medical unit of the Primitive Group to the Molsom colony area so that they could develop a regular habit of accepting treatment from the registered medical practitioners. To my delight I observed that the average Molsoms gradually stopped depending on the quack. But their faith in Awchai remained as it was.

Table - 2

Distribution of the Molsom houses according to types

Type of house	No. of houses	Percentage to total houses of the sample villages.
Mud wall with thatched roof	60	18.76
bamboo wall with thatched roof	190	59.76
Chungin	70	21.87
Total	320	

These sorts of changes in the type of the houses have resulted mainly from the adoption of permanent type of settled cultivation. In normal shifting economy the jhumias leave a homestead area after one or two years of inhabitation, because after a couple of years they have to shift their jhuming operation to a different hillock and are obliged to stay in adjacent area. Their mode of cultivation necessitate a temporary nature of settlement. Hence the house that the jhumias construct are also of temporary nature. But in settled cultivation ceaseless use of the same plot of land requires stay of cultivators on a settled area year after year.

Food Habit

The Molsoms are omnivorous so far as their food habit is concerned. Rice is their staple food. Two varieties of local rice namely *bati* and *sazu* are commonly used. The former is used in common dish and the latter is taken occasionally. Vegetables, meat, fish, dry fish etc. are common among their food stuff. A common Molsom meal consists of boiled rice, a preparation of dry fish, especially *putty* fish, chilli and some vegetables locally known as *annok*, a vegetable curry or fish curry or a curry preparation of either pork or chicken or other birds or reptiles. Mainly two methods namely boiling, locally known as *but* and roasting, locally known as *kong* are used in preparing food. Food stuffs are boiled traditionally, in bamboo pot, locally known as Bul which nowadays is replaced, in most cases, by earthen pots or metallic cooking pails. For boiling in bamboo pot, rice and water are poured and the open end of the pot is covered tightly with grass or banana leaves. The pot is then heated on fire. A special variety of bamboo, locally known as *rumaoru* is used to make *bul*. While boiling in bamboo pot water is not strained off from boiled rice. A bamboo pot can be used only once as its outer surface gets burnt after the cooking. Traditionally meat, fish, dry fish etc. are cooked by singeing which nowadays is limited to the case of preparing an item of dry fish only.

Traditionally no oil is used in cooking as the process of frying or roasting were absent in food preparation. Chili, turmeric and ginger are the common spices of which the use of chili is dominant. Curry, Annok and other food preparations tests pungent due to excessive use of chili. Locally made alkaline water known as Chaltui is used to cook hard roots, herbs, etc. Such alkaline water is made from the ashes of dry bark of banana or bamboo plant. Keeping ashes in a funnel made of bamboo splits water is poured slowly at the open end. The alkaline water which is locally known as chalphu is a solution of particles of ashes, is collected in a container placed below the conical end of the funnel. Same kind of alkaline water is used also by the other tribal communities of the state and is well known as kharpani. Such alkaline water makes the hard roots and herbs soft and smooth.

Annok is also popular among the other tribal communities of the state and is commonly known as godak . The preparation of annok or godak is more or less the same with a little variation in the vegetables components. For preparation of Annok at first some dry fish is taken and some vegetables such as buds of bamboo plants, locally known as Toi , wild potato, arum root, beans, etc. are cut into pieces which are then put into bamboo pot along with green chilies and dry fishes and well mixed by pulping with a small bamboo or wooden stick. The bamboo pot is then heated on fire and after that the boiled mixture is taken out and kept on a piece of banana leaf for use. Sometime fishes or meat are also used in preparation of Annok. Excess pork or other meats are cut into pieces, strung side by side with bamboo split and kept over the hearth to be dried up and thus preserved for future consumption.

It is observed that the traditional system of food preparation among the tribal communities of Tripura has got some scientific basis which has made the system itself adoptive to the local situation. Mention may be made of the boiling system. On the hills the boiling point of water decreases due to low atmospheric pressure. As a result cooking take more time as excess of heat is required for the food stuffs to be boiled. In this case cooking in air tight bamboo pot minimizes the time of cooking because the water in air tight bamboo pot boils on normal boiling point as the water vapour increase the pressure in the air tight bamboo pot. Besides cooking in air tight bamboo pot is hygienic. Pigs usually bear the spores/germs of hook worm which affect human body if pork is taken without proper boiling. But the spores/germs die if the pork is boiled at a high temperature. The spores / germs die in the case of singeing also. In this regard it may be mentioned that the pork is a very favourite food item among the tribals of Tripura. Moreover, the food value, in case of rice especially, remains intact if it is boiled in such a pot from which no water is strained off.

Traditionally, the Molsoms do not know the use of milk. Milk, in fact, is nauseating to many of them. In this regard the other tribal communities of the state are their counterparts. Drinking of local alcoholic beverage namely *zukola* and the local liquor namely *rakzu* is most popular among them. Zukola is prepared, broadly, in two phases. Chall , the

fermenting cake, is prepared in the first phase. Rice dust of about 100 grams, sugarcane leaf one piece, cholkung , a local herb, two or three leaves, one ripen banana, three or four pieces of green chili, Banchikolnum, a local herb, three or four leaves and about half a kilogram of boiled rice are mixed and grinded by the pestle and mortar. Water is added to the mixture dust converting these into paste from which cakes are prepared. Some hay are scattered on a banana leaf on which cakes are kept covering them with some more hay. These are then kept in a cool place for about three or four days and then dried in the sun light. These dry cakes are known as Chall which are preserved in bamboo made basket known as Chall- rebom . The number and variety of leaf, root, bark etc. used in Chall preparation very from place to place, person to person, but the rice dust, boiled rice and Chalkung are used commonly as basic ingredients. The taste and flavor of the Zukola differ in accordance with the variety of other components.

In the second phase, about one kilogram of boiled rice is spread on a bamboo mat and a Chall is mixed. The mixture is then pulped by hand and put in an earthen vessel. Water is filled in the vessel and its mouth is covered with a banana leaf. The vessel is then kept untouched in a cool place for five to six days for fermentation. Fermented beverage or zukola is drunk through bamboo-straw locally known as chumki .

The local liquor namely *rakzu* is prepared, as stated earlier, from distillation of local beverage. Distillation is done in the local distiller known as batizone consists of three parts namely a boiler known as *bel* which is made of clay, cooler tube made of clay locally known as somnang is used for cooling the liquor vapour. The liquor vapour is passed through a bamboo pipe locally known as batizone . Another stronger liquor locally known as rakzual is prepared by distillation of rakzu.

Liquor and alcoholic beverages are prepared by the females. Some restrictions are observed by the women while preparing liquor or beverage. They take bath and wear clean dresses. Besides, the women who are in menstrual cycle are not allowed to take part in the preparation; they are even not allowed to touch the materials or the persons engaged in the preparation. There are some women, more or less, in every Molsom

village, who are well known for their expertise in liquor preparation. Sometime simply by tasting liquor one can identify its manufacturer. These women use some special bark, roots etc. which bring about the variation in taste or flavour. They generally do not disclose such special components to others. There are some women whom the Molsoms believe to be gifted ones and it is thought that liquor prepared by them is bound to be better in quality and more in quantity. Tobacco smoking is another common habit among them. This habit also is analogous to the habits of other communities of the state. An indigenous implement made of bamboo and locally known as *dabo* is used for smoking.

Some formalities are observed while drinking or smoking is done in formal gathering or in groups. Persons having higher social status get first preference to smoke or drink. In a village gathering, for instance, the order of offer respectively follows from the Awchai the village priest to *khuoulm* the village Chaudhury, *khandolloom* the assistant to Chudhury, *khandoltoum* the messenger and other elders. Drinking or smoking in front of elders or other respected persons is not socially restricted nor is treated as unmannerly as found in the neighboring plain land society. These have, rather, some prestige value in their society. Guests and other respected persons are cordially entertained with smokes and drinks. Distinguished persons are honoured and entertained with the liquor prepared from the *sazu* or *binni* rice.

In Molsom society, liquor is used in every socio-religious occasion. It is used in the rites and rituals related to birth, puberty, marriage, death and worships, festivals and ceremonies—in the joy and sorrows of life. Traditionally the alcoholic beverage *zukola* was used predominantly, but nowadays it has been replaced by the local liquor *rakzu*. Zukola at present is preferred mainly by the female, whereas the *rakzu* is widely popular among then male.

Minor boys or girls are not allowed to drink or smoke. In some cases, at present, molasses is used in lieu of rice especially for *rakzu* or *rakzual* preparation.

The memory of tasting *rakzu* for the first time in my life is still fresh in my memory. I was, at that time, doing my fieldwork in Kalabon Molsom Bari

of Udaipur sub-division. It was the very day I was started residing in a small house in Kalabon Molsom Bari. It was a new bamboo walled, thatch-roofed house of Sri Swaran Kumar Molsom, the Chaudhury of the village. The house was especially made as a shelter for his domestic cows. The village people spared that house for me for the period of fieldwork. They voluntarily constructed a bamboo made *macha* to be used as my bed. In the evening of that day some young Molsoms gathered in that house with some local drinks. I welcomed them and offered them Rs.20 to meet the expenditure of the drinks. But they refused to take the money. I honoured their sentiment. They offered me some *rakzu* in a bamboo-pipe specially made for the day's occasion. Since it was the first time I was going to taste such an alcoholic drink my mind was full of doubts whether I would be able to consume it. Just after tasting one mouth full of the *rakzu*, I realised that I will not be able to swallow the whole of the liquor they had given me because of the peculiar smell of the drink that I could not stand. I, however, managed to consume, in course of gossiping, full of my share. Next day, at noon, I was invited to a family occasion. It was an occasion of observing the *abursuk* ceremony which is observed after detachment of last part of the umbilical cord of a new born. The new born was the son of Sri Nityahari Molsom. The village Chudhury and some elderly persons had gathered in a room where an arrangement was made for me to seat. In that gossiping every body was drinking *zukola*, the local alcoholic beverage. Two bamboo straws were inserted into an earthen vessel full of *zukula* from which we drank. At first the Village Choudhury Sri Swaran Kumar Molsom consumed *zukola* and after that some water added to the *zukola* container and was offered to me. I found that there was a marking in the body of longer straw. I was told that I could consume *zukol*a till the water level touches the marking. I started consuming as I was told. But when I started drinking through the straw, I found that some fermented rice were coming through the bamboo-straw, the taste and smell of which were not good. The village Chudhury realised my problem and he told something in Molsom to a young men. I could not understood what he told but observed that the man took another bamboo-straw one end of which was covered with a piece of cotton-net. That bamboo-straw was inserted into the *zukola* container and I consumed the *zukola* up to the marking made on the body of the

straw. That Zukola was prepared with mummy rice and the taste was almost like beer. I realised that *zukola* is a good rice beer.

Drinking Water

I observed that there was serious problem relating to supply and habit of drinking water in the Molsom villages. On the supply side there was no adequate supply of safe drinking water, the government had begun only some works in this area. But wherever there was availability of safer drinking water the Molsoms were not accepting them with delight. Many did not like the well water and its typical irony smell and therefore they preferred to stick to their traditional habit of drinking water extracted from river-beds or from some other conventional sources. As an obvious consequence, the average Molsoms, despite their better immunity system, were often suffering from water-carried diseases. I as an employee in the Tribal Welfare Department of the state felt concerned about the problem and thought of doing something to change their habit for the better.

In this context, I would like to mention about an interesting development which I experienced with regard to the acceptance of the Mark-II tube well as the source of drinking water. The inmates of the Molsom colony were habituated in using the water of *tuikaran*, a small hole made on the bank of streamlet or *crerra* to promote send-filtered water to come out. As a part of providing new infrastructural facilities, one Mark-II tube well was installed in the settlement area of the Molsoms but the Molsoms were not using the water of Mark-II tube well since they were not liking its smell. They than were using its water for taking bath and washing of utensils. I tried to make them aware of the ill effect of using the water of Tuikaran and requested them to use the water of the Mark-II tube well since it would be better for their health and there would be less recurrence of water-carried diseases. But there was no instant acceptance of my appeal. I, however, continued putting across my arguments for the use of well water for drinking. Fortunately, a good numbers of youths were convinced and agreed to help motivate the colony people to use the water for drinking purposes. And finally our venture was successful. The inmates of the Molsom colony gradually started drinking tube well water as they could feel the difference themselves.

Chapter — 4

Economic Life of the Molsoms

The Molsoms are, by tradition, shifting cultivators. Among them the shifting cultivation is known as *lau*. They have been surviving in a subsistence economy, cultivating food items just enough for their hand to mouth existence. Shifting cultivation involves barest of implements. This type of cultivation is practiced by many of the tribes of North East India even now. In shifting cultivation usually a few crops are grown together which are all useful for the cultivators because these are either food crops or those which are of use in their daily life . Apart from shifting cultivation, they also practice subsidiary economic activities such as animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, gathering of roots, tubers etc. for food and some other activities.

The present study shows an interesting feature of the economic life of the Molsoms. It is found that most of them have adopted settled agriculture and only a few households are practicing shifting cultivation. The reasons for this have been discussed in the latter part of this chapter. The traditional form of shifting cultivation and other economic activities as practiced by the Molsoms will be discussed now.

Shifting cultivation

Traditional method of agriculture namely shifting cultivation is done in the slopes of the hills. This system of cultivation is well known as Jhum and the cultivator as Jhumia in the state. After one season of cultivation a Jhum field is to be left fallow for a successive period of nine to ten years especially in Tripura for regeneration of forests which ultimately help the land to regain its productivity. The possession of a group on a particular *jhum* land is mostly temporary in nature. The jhum area which is possessed by a particular group may be occupied by another group after the *jhum*-cycle and the latter group may also be of another tribe. Thus there is no practice of establishing permanent occupancy of the *jhum* land by a particular tribal group.

The *jhum* cultivation, as practiced by the Molsoms, consists of many phases, such as, site selection, jungle cutting, setting of fire, clearing of debris, seed sowing, weeding, watching. harvesting etc. Mainly three

tools or equipment are used for the purpose which are hand chopper (locally known as *chemlu* which has an iron blade with two sharp working ends, one at outside and the other on tip; for handling an wooden handle is attached to the blade) and a small basket locally called *kaichaning* (used for keeping seeds) and sickles.

Generally during winter — in November-December, a broad area is selected by the village-chief who is accompanied to the site by some old experienced villagers. Preference is given to a place where plenty of hill slopes are there and which is nearer to the homestead area. A bamboo forest area is also preferred as, according to their experience, it is more fertile. After a broad area is selected, further selection is done for the individual household by the head and other members of that household.

The area of each group is demarcated by natural marks like big tree, stream, river etc. After selecting a particular area many cross-mark made of bamboo splits known as *thorba* are put on the boarder line of the area which indicate the temporary possession of somebody on that area. The meaning of the Thorba is known to every tribal community of the state and when they see these symbols in an area, other group do not consider that area for their occupation. Another type of symbols are used after selecting a place for the individual household's cultivation. Many bamboo pieces are put on the boundary line of a selected area the height of which remain at chest level of the head of the household and about two feet of the tip of the bamboo pieces are split giving them a conical shape. A household occupies as much land as it can manage with its members.

Site selection, both in group and at the individual level, is followed by some magico-religious tests. The test for the village level selection is done by the Awchai and that in household level is done by the household head. Two bamboo splits are dropped from above in favour of a particular site or plot of land. If the splits fall having opposite side up, that is one dorsal and one ventral, then it signifies that the field is auspicious and falling of splits with the same side up indicates that the field would not be favourable for cultivation. This test is locally known as *pertet* . The tests are done three times simultaneously and if at least for one time the split do not fall in auspicious manner then they leave the site of plot in question and search for another. The dorsal side of a bamboo split represents, as they believe, female and the ventral side represents male.

If the splits fall with the same side up it symbolizes barrenness because only male or female can not give birth to an offspring whereas a male and a female jointly can. Based on this concept the opposite sides of the splits are treated as the sign of productivity.

The second test is done by dream revelation locally known as Remangrekai . A lump of earth is brought home and is kept under the pillow of the village chief or household head as the case may be. The reveler wears clean cloths and sleeps alone for the dream. If he dreams a dream relating to clean water, marriage ceremony, face of unmarried girl, house, sands, or naked unmarried girl then it signifies high productivity of the land. But a dream relating to buffalo, dog, monkey, cat, face of an unknown person or a married women portends low productivity of the land.

The bushes, bamboo shrubs and other wild growth on the selected land are cut down by hand chopper. This jungle cutting is known as *lauoat*. The uprooted jungles are left on the field to dry up for about a month which is known as *pemphau* . Fire is set on the pathless jungles usually in the evening, this is locally known as *lauhal* .The fire continues for two or three days and only males participate in this action. During jhum-fire some magical practices are followed . Mustard seed, Ghila (a local seed entada scandens) and alkaline water (*chaltui*) are sprinkled on the field with a view to drive out the evil spirits. Minuthappa is worshipped as a protective measure against mishaps like injury from the quill of porcupine or the bite of reptile. At home women sprinkle water and place hand-fans on the courtyards with a view to relieve the mother earth from the burning sensation. Un-burnt debris are collected and set on fire which is known as Sangrukhom . The ashes remain on the field and are used as manures.

In the first part of summer in April-May, after a few showers when the soil becomes loamy, the seed sowing starts. If there is a continuous spell of drought in the summer the Tui Pathen is worshipped for rain. Different varieties of seeds such as paddy, sesames, cotton, pumpkin, water melon, chili etc. are mixed together and kept in the Kaichaning. Male and female members of the group of cultivators tie the kaichening to their left waist by a tree-fiber and stand in a row to sow seeds. They make small shallow holes with the tip of hand chopper and put some seeds in it. The females predominate the sowing team. Sowing is initiated from the southeast corner of the field where, at first, on a small sacred plot of land

some seeds like ginger, turmeric, mastered etc. are sown. This small plot of land is known as Barmathun and the crop of this area is not harvested. The sowing continues from the top to the bottom of the field. In some cases, nowadays, paddy seeds are sown on separate plots.

After the seeds have germinated and the plants have grown to a certain length, the weeds are uprooted from the field. Weeding is done four time in a season. The first weeding is known as Lauramchaul and is done after fifteen to twenty days of seed sowing. First weeding is done very carefully as at that time, crop plants remain still in their infancy. Rinichaul is the second weeding which is done after ten to fifteen days of first weeding and Ruthumchaul while the third weeding is done when cornstalk grow. The fourth weeding namely Ruthenchaul is done, if necessary, in the period between the third weeding and harvesting. Besides, a magical rite called Sena is also performed as a preventive measure against the excessive growth of weeds in the field. On the seventh day of Vaisak (April-May), for Sena rite, some weeds are uprooted from different parts of the field, and kept on a leaf. The leaf then is made to float on the water of a stream or river. They believe that as the weeds flow away with the current of water the probability of weeds growing on the field also declines therewith.

When cornstalks grow, these are protected from birds and wild animals. A watch house known as Kaireng is built on a tree or on the top of a hillock within the jhum-field. A number of bamboo made small instruments locally known as Rolerokihem, for producing sound, are erected here and there on the field and are connected by a long rope with a pillar of the watch house. The watch party pull the rope and make slapping sound in rolerokihem which drive away the birds and other animals. In some cases they bit an empty tin and make sound. At night flambeau are set especially on the probable pathway of the boars. Watching continue till the crops are harvested. The different varieties of crops ripe at different times so the watching has to continue for a long period, though the seriousness of the job decreases after paddy is harvested. The youths of the household shift temporally to the watch house with essential utensils to facilitate constant vigil. The period of vigilance is also the time, as mentioned earlier, for mate selection among the Molsoms and the other tribes of the state. The members of different

watch house gossip together, make merry, sing songs and thus enjoy the otherwise monotonous job of watching.

The crops are harvested as and when they are ripe. Reaping of paddy, locally known as *songat* constitutes the major harvesting activity and it is done with sickle. A rite locally known as Sakumphai is observed before the start of harvesting. For Sakumphai a paddy plant is uprooted from the jhum field and is taken to the village where it is worshipped by sacrificing a hen. Many bunches are made from the reaped paddy shoots and are kept on the field for two or three days. After that threshing is done on a funnel shaped big basket locally known as Jeobem. The carrying of paddy from watch house to village is known as *sangrithak*. In the village paddy grains are stored in small granary known as *dal* which are constructed separately for the respective households. In the past paddy used to be stored in warehouse locally known as *sapang*, constructed in a row at the middle part of the village. In *sapang* separate rooms ware there for each and every household of the village and these were maintained collectively by the villagers. Nowadays the use of sapang is out of practice. Other crops are harvested as and when they are ripen.

Both male and female members take part in harvesting. A ceremony known as Sarbingor is observed when new crops are cooked and eaten for the first time. In sarbingor the Minuthapa deity is worshipped after the sun rise by sacrificing two hens. Boiled jhum rice is offered on the tip of a banana leaf. Some jhum rice is kept in an earthen pot or bamboo pot and preserved in the house. This rice pot is locally known as Sairibing and is worshipped on every full moon-day with a prayer for higher productivity. This practice of preserving and worshipping the rice-pot is found also among the Tripuris of the state, who call it *mailuma.*

In every phase of jhum cultivation, mutual exchange of labour, locally known as Ron, takes place as and when necessary. On the field, the speed and unity of team work is maintained by humming or singing a rhythmic music.

Hunting

With a variety of indigenous weapons the Molsoms hunt games. Only males take part in this activity. Hunting is tabooed for the women. They believe that if women participate in hunting, they would be attacked by a tiger. The type of hunting implements very according to the species and nature of the game.

Hunting is done more or less, throughout the year though the winter is considered to be the prime season. The village priest worships Hasongnu pathein the forest deity of the Molsom with an egg before the group goes out for hunting. In this case the priest can forecast the availability of games observing the yolk of the egg. If any red spot is found in the yolk then it reveals fruitfulness of the expedition and it denotes a better hunting if the colour of the yolk is found to be more yellow.

A hunting team is generally consisted of four to eight persons. During hunting a team is divided into two parties. One party takes food, drinks, extra weapons and some other essential things and follow the main hunters maintaining a distance from them. In deep forest the two parties maintain communication with each other through some symbolic sounds produced by them orally or with the help of a special type of bamboo read. Generally they produce chirp, screech, chatter sounds so that the game remains unaware of the hunters. As and when the first party hunts a game they call the second party through symbolic sounds and hand over the prey to them. At night fire is set on some dry offshoots, around which one party sleeps and the other keeps watch by rotation. The game bogged in a group hunting is distributed among the villagers. The village chief generally gets the right leg of the big game. The people of a particular village have to hunt within it's boundary. Hunting in the area of another village is treated as a social offence.

Large and ferocious games are generally caught by trapping as risk is involved in face to face hunting, though in some cases, especially in group hunting, ferocious games are killed with hand weapons. Broadly, two types of traps are used by them. Traps like Janter, Sungchang, Archachang and bird-lime etc. are used to capture the game alive and traps like Zuth , Ringchang, Phaiphachang, Gurapchang, Mankhawang, etc. are used to kill the pray. The hand weapons such as spear (Shai), bow and arrow (Thal-phel), sling Phell-sylum) etc. are used to kill or injure the game. In some cases guns are also used in hunting. Among the Molsoms, as also among other tribes of the state, a good hunter enjoys some special status in society. The degree of such status is determined by the skill in hunting and the number of big games a person has hunted.

Fishing

Fishing is done in the stream, river and in other water sources. Both individual and group level involvement is found in fishing. Mainly two types of implements are used in fishing, namely, traps such as Phol, net, Chal, Ahak, Ngoi, Ngoiinchor etc. and hand implements like Ngakoi, Calching etc. Besides, latex of local herb namely Ru is used especially in community fishing. During winter when the water level of a river or stream decreases a huge quantity of ru is put in the river or the stream. Ru stupefies the fishes which are then easily collected by the villagers.

The fishing implements used by the Molsoms are akin to those of the neighboring plains people namely the Bengalis. Unlike hunting expedition, no deity is propitiated before going out for fishing, nor the fishes are used in any rituals as pig and hens are used. Besides, the Molsoms do not know the technique of making dry fish which they widely use. This may be taken to indicate the fact that the Molsom have adopted the technique of fishing at a later period.

Settled Cultivation

Over the years there has been a major shift from the traditional economy of the Molsoms. As mentioned earlier, many households have switched over to settled cultivation which is mainly practiced on the plain lands, between the feet of two hillocks, commonly known as Jul. This Jul is well-known in the state as Lunga or Nal. In some cases cultivation is also done on the plain surface of the hillock which is locally known as Tang. In settled agriculture the Molsom are practicing multiple cropping and they remain engaged in the job through out the year. In plain cultivation a single variety of crop is cultivated on a particular plot of land and the production is higher than that of jhum cultivation. Both cash crops and crops for consumption are cultivated in settled cultivation. Jute and sesame are the main cash crops and these are cultivated during pre-kharif and rabbi season respectively. Paddy the staple food-crop is cultivated during kharif. Other food crops such as pumpkin, vumber, chili, arum, kidney been, pigeon-pea, sweet pumpkin etc. and bringle, sweet potato, maize, Maisenga, the seed of a local herb which is used to make parched rice, etc. are cultivated during the *rabbi* season. During pre-kharif and rabbi season necessary irrigation is done from nearby stream or river. Water is lifted with the help of a bucket pulled and

swayed by ropes held by two persons standing on opposite sides. During kharif season the land is naturally irrigated by the rain water. However, where water sources are not available nearby, irrigation is a major problem for plain land cultivation.

Tilling of land is done by spade or plough pulled by bullock. Generally male members participate in tilling or plowing. The preparation of land finally depends on the variety of crop to be sown. For paddy, for instance, the soil is first thoroughly soaked in water so that it turns muddy. The upper surface of the soil is leveled with a loader pulled by bullock or man. A big plot is divided into a number of small plots by setting up ridge of earth to hold water. A nursery bed is prepared to saw paddy seeds and grow paddy shoots. For cultivating other crops the soil need not be converted into absolute mud though it is required to be made wet especially at the time of seed germination.

The system of sowing and the nature of cultivation are also dependent on the type and variety of the crops to be cultivated. Paddy seeds, for instance, are to be soaked in water and kept for two/three days for germination. When seeds germinate these are scattered on the nursery bed. Just after the sowing of seeds and growth of paddy shoots up to about three inches' height, constant watching, especially during day time, over the nursery bed is done to protect the seeds from the birds. Usually teenagers are involved in the job. For this job they make sound from a hakbor or beat an empty tin with a stick or even chase the birds.

After the growth of paddy shoots up to one twelve to fourteen inches these are transplanted to the main field. Three to five shoots are taken together in right hand and rooted in the clay-soil. Both male and female members participate in the job. They stand in a row and do the job of transplantation. Except paddy and some seeds like chili, bringel etc. other seeds are directly sown to the main field.

To protect crops from domestic and wild animals the field is surrounded by bamboo fancying. When crops ripe up the cultivators keep constant watch over the field, as in case of jhuming. All day long, they sit in a small watch-house constructed at a corner of the field and drive away the birds and other animals by making sound and noise. At night flambeaus are kept on or near the probable pathway of boars. In some cases scarecrow locally known as Manierrimil are set to keep the birds away and as a measure against evil eyes. An old duster or a round shaped earthen

vessel decorated with charcoal and lime, which is locally known as Belkinot is also set on a bamboo stand as a protective measure against the evil looks. The Molsom believe that malicious look may not be able to cause any harm to the crops if it falls in the belkinot manior rimil or lomphi first. Similar practices for protecting crops from evil eyes is also found among the neighboring plain cultivators, namely the Bengalis. Watching over the crops continues till harvesting is over. Watching in settled cultivation is not as much colourful as it is in case of jhum cultivation. It is not so interesting and thrilling to the youth groups, hence no love song is sung nor do they enjoy any romance in watching.

Most of the crops such as paddy, sesame, jute etc. are harvested with sickle, and other crops, as and when they get ripe, are harvested by hand. No rite or ritual is observed relating to harvesting in plain cultivation. Husking and grinding of paddy, sesame etc. are done by pestle and mortar or by seesaw. Before using the harvested crops Sarbingor rite is observed. Mutual exchange of labour takes place, as is found in case of jhum cultivation as well as and when necessary in all phases of settled cultivation.

Earlier the Molsoms did not know about the use of animals in the field of agriculture, although, they were habituated in consuming fleshes. But later on, with the acceptance of settled cultivation, they have adopted the use of cattle for ploughing. At present bullock and in some cases buffaloes are found in many families especially those which posses landed property in the plains.

In the new agricultural set up the Molsoms have adopted many of the socio-religious rites and rituals related to agricultural activities which were practiced in jhum cultivation. They worship Sangrak and Hasugnu before preparing a new piece of plain land with a view to have better output and, at the same time, as a preventive measure against the evil eyes. They also perform Sena rite for preventing weeds in the crop-field; observe, as stated earlier, Sarbingor the festival performed while eating new autumn crops for the first time in the season and so on, though the sanctity and importance of these rites and rituals have, to some extent, been diminished. Sacrificing of hen, for instance, was a must in Hasungnu worship during selection of a jhum field, but it is not necessary while the Hasungnu is worshipped before preparing a new piece of plain land for cultivation. At the same time some of the practices relating to traditional

cultivation have become out of practice in the changed agricultural set up. Mention may be made of dream revelation or Pertet which were observed for selecting a jhum land, these are not observed while a new plain land is selected for cultivation.

This is probably because of the paucity of plain land for settled cultivation the Molsoms can avail. As no alternative land is available even if such tests forecast the low productivity of the land or indicate it to be ominous no magical test is performed to select a site for settled cultivation. Besides, the magico-religious rites relating to firing of jungles are also not in practice as the system of firing is absent in the processes of settled cultivation. This may be due to the fact that most of the plain land have minimum jungles which can be cleared by cutting or uprooting only and once a plain land is prepared their remain no chance for jungle to grow up as the system of jhum-cycle is absent in settled cultivation. Over and above, they use cow dung, composed manure etc. as fertilizers in plain cultivation which diminish the necessity of using ashes. Besides, there might have been some other difficulties to set fire on the jungles of the plain lands, especially when preparing it for the first time, as most of these lands are situated near the settlement or areas which are used otherwise such as for grazing of animals or rearing, horticultural lands etc. where fire may cause damage.

Along with the settled agriculture the Molsoms have adopted another branch of cultivation namely horticulture. They are now cultivating jackfruits, banana, pineapple, guava, mango and some other fruits on the hill slopes near their settlement area.

Hunting among the Molsom has been limited to birds, boars and to some other reptiles. Fishing however, is more popular than it was earlier, but food gathering, more or less, has gone out of practice though during drought or other crisis period they collect fruits, roots, tubers, leaves etc. from the forest. Animal husbandry has become more popular and some new species such as duck, goat, milching cow etc. have been domesticated.

After having adopted to settled cultivation the Molsoms have experienced some remarkable changes in the areas of working forces and land use pattern.

A good number of Molsoms have become land less so far as plain land cultivation is concerned because of the paucity of the plain land. These land less Molsoms have been working as agriculture labours, day labours or Bargaders to the neighboring Bengalis or to the landed tribals and practicing jhum as a subsidiary occupation or, in a few cases, as the primary occupation. In Molsom society labour is not purchasable commodity due to the existence of the system of mutual exchange of labour which, in fact, obstructs the possibility of labour becoming a commodity especially within their own society. But for the people of other communities, especially the Bengalis, they work as wage labours. Some land wining families have surplus labour due to the fact that unlike in jhum cultivation where a family could occupy as much land as it could manage to cultivate with its members, a family in settled cultivation, is not in a position to have so much of land due to the paucity of the latter. These households, in most cases, engage their surplus manpower as day labours, in fire wood selling or, if suitable land is found, in *jhuming*.

Table-3

Distribution of the household of the sample villages according to the type of animal husbandry in practice

Type of animal Husbandry	No. of Household in practice	Percentage to the total household of the sample village
Piggery	161	50.30
Poultry	260	81.31
Duckary	30	09.37
Bullock	159	49.69
Milch-cow	77	24.06
Goatery	120	31.88

Table-4

Distribution of the household of the sample villages based on occupation of the head

Primary Occupoation			Secondary Occupation		
Name of Occupation	No of Houseold in practice	Percentage to total household of the sample village	Name of Occupation	No. of Household in practice	Percentage to total household of the sample village
Settled cultivation	150	46.88	Settled cultivation	93	29.10
Barga cultivation	28	8.76	Agri.-cum-day labours	170	53.12
Day labours	34	10.62	Animal husbandry	300	93.75
Agri.-cum-day labours	84	26.25	Crafts	320	100.00
Jhuming	24	6.88	Jhuming	82	45.63

Previously in jhum cultivation the land was not a salable commodity but in settled economy it has become purchasable. Besides, there was no unit, traditionally, to measure landed property so far as jhum area was concerned, but some descriptive explanations were used to denote the area of a plot of jhum or other type of land. For example, to denote a big jhum area one might say that the jhum area of their village was so wide that a wet warm cloth would get dry if one traveled wearing it, round the whole area or it would not be possible to hear any shout from one end to the other or one would not be able to see a big tree which stands on one end of the field if one goes to other end and so on. But nowadays the units like Kani, Gonda, Bigha etc. are used to denote the measurement of an area as such terms are used by the neighboring Bengalis. One can thus discern the intrusion of land-related culture of the dominant society into the Molsom society. The other way of looking at the changes is that there has been a growing awareness among the Molsom about the value of land as a result of ever increasing pressure of man on land.

Changing in Economic life: The Nature and Reasons:

The tribes of Tripura have been facing tremendous economic crisis, for a greater section of them are still clinging to their traditional method of shifting cultivation, commonly known as jhum. A number of measures have been taken to wean them from shifting cultivation and to persuade them to take to some other advanced economic activities, especially to settled cultivation. But with a few exceptions most of these attempts have proved futile. In this respect the change over of a greater section of the Molsoms from traditional methods of shifting cultivation to settled cultivation deserves special analysis.

In trying to analyze the factors which helped the Molsom in adopting settled cultivation we have gone through some written documents relating to the past economic conditions of the Tripura tribals, interviewed some aged and experienced Molsoms and some of their plain Bengali neighbors. It has been found that before the adoption of settled cultivation their economy had been going through a period of severe crisis. The old Molsoms still remember those days when a family could hardly manage sustenance for three to four months a year even after engaging all the hands in jhum cultivation. The remaining months of a year had to be spent in great uncertainty.

The hardship in economic life was not a unique event for the Molsoms. It was common to all jhumias of the state and it took a long time to come to such a condition. The process started ever since Tripura had come under the hegemony of the British in 1765 when its rulers were burdened with bribe (Nazar) in addition to the revenue to meet up their princely requirements. The ill subjects were increasingly pressed to contribute to the state's revenue. The hill subjects, especially the jhumias had to pay house tax known as Ghar Chukti Kar. The amount was a fixed one for all jhumia households per annum irrespective of how many members it had and how much land it cultivated under jhum. The amount, however, varied from tribe to tribe.

With a view to increase income, the people from neighboring districts of British India were encouraged to settle down on the plains of the state. A good portion of the plain land was allotted to the non-tribal immigrants, especially the Bengalis, on payment of premium (*Nazrana*) and settlement of annual land revenue. At the same time, leaders of the

hill tribes from the neighboring British District were also invited to cultivate jhum on the hill areas. Those leaders were given the titles of Raja and offered a deed of grant (*Sanad*). By such steps the rulers of Tripura were able to increase the state's revenue and thus as early as in 1785 they paid Rs.1,39,000 lacks as bribe to the English. Beside those who were encouraged by the rulers to settle in Tripura, a good wave of immigrants came and settled in the state due to heavy crushing burden of taxation imposed upon them by the English Trading company and their successors in the neighboring British Indian districts (Saigol 1978: 43). It would not be proper to think that the tribals of Tripura, especially the jhumias, were in a better economic position then. "The hill people as a rule" , wrote Hunter (1876:499) describing their material condition " are very poor and improvident. A good season means with them merely plenty of pigs to eat, and plenty of spirits to drink; a bad season is next door to starvation ". However, the population of the state went on increasing and by 1875 it reached the figure of 74,242 (42,345 tribals and 31,897 non tribals). It steadily increased to 1,73,325 (91,544 tribals and 81,781 non tribals) in 1901. The increasing trend in population continued steadily with the figure reaching 3,82,448 (1,90,036 tribals and 1,92,412 non-tribals) in 1931; 6,45,707 (2,29,865 tribals and 4,15,842 non tribals) in 1951; 11,42,005 (3,60,061 tribals and 7,81,944 non tribals) in 1961 and so on.

Table-5

Distribution of the state's population in various decades

Year	Total Population	Tribal Population	Percentage to the total population of the stage	Non-tribal Population	Percentage to the total population of the stage
1875	74242	42345	54.04	31897	42.96
1901	173325	92544	52.82	81781	47.18
1931	382448	190036	49.69	192412	50.31
1951	645707	229865	35.60	415842	64.40
1961	1142005	360061	31.93	781944	68.47

Source: Misra (1976), Hunter (1876), Deb Barman (1933), Census 1931-61.

It may be noticed from the table that as early as in 1931 the non tribal population outnumbered the tribal population in of the state. But up to the middle part of the present century such increase had no detrimental impact on the economy of the tribals, mainly of the jhumias of the state. It was so, because the non tribal immigrants were mostly settled on the plain areas and the jhumias did not know the utility of those stretches of land for agricultural purpose then. Such immigration rather opened the channel for exchange of culture traits between the people of hills and plains. In fact, the technique of utilizing the plain land for agricultural purposes was diffused to the tribals from those immigrant plain settlers. It has been incorrectly opined, in this regard, that, " the immigrants were from the plains driving the tribals to the hills '(Saigal : 43). The tribals in fact reside on the hill by nature and tradition in Tripura. In this regard it is worth mentioning here that in Tripura the settled cultivation started to a remarkable extent from the middle part of the nineteenth century. There was little or no plough cultivation among the tribes till the last part of the eighteenth century (Hunter 1876 : 505).

Though the hill economy in the past was not in a plentiful condition, it, however, provided them subsistence except during the period of droughts or other calamities as far as the productivity of the land was concerned. Lewin, the then Deputy Commissioner of Chittagang Hill Tract (1869) estimated that a jhumia couple could jhum nine kanis (3.6 acres) of land every year where the man had to put in 176 days of labour and his wife 146 days and they together produced Rs.75 worth of paddy and cotton and Rs.4 worth of vegetables. They could make an additional thirty rupees by wood cutting, selling of fire wood and other forest products. A couple could thus earn a total of Rs.106.00 of which about Rs.41.00 were spent on rice, fish, oil and salt; Rs.10.00 on betel and tobacco; Rs.12.00 on cloth; Rs.14.00 on rituals and festivals; Rs.7.00 for treatment; Rs.15.00 on ornaments and Rs.7.00 on seeds and implements for the jhum work (Saigol 1978 :42).

The inter tribal conflict, among the other factor, hampered the production in the hills. Due to persistence of such conflicts, the jhumias were unable to move from one place to another for better jhum land during the period of jhum cycle. Regarding such hostile relation among the various groups of tribals, the Political Agent of hill Tripura reported in 1874 that though there was ample land suitable for jhuming, the want of fresh jhum land was severely felt in some parts of the state because of inter tribal conflict.

" Jhuming is" , he reported after a journey from Udaipur to Agartala through interior tribal villages, " the most exhaustive method of agriculture; three or four crops are grown at the same time on the same soil; consequently a second crop will not be a full one ". Trying to analyse the cause of low yield in jhuming, he further said that for a high-yield jhuming, the land needs to be allowed to lie fellow for ten years, after which period of time the jungle which has grown up in the meantime may be felled and burnt, the ashes serving as manure. But for this it is imperative that the jhumias must move to some fresh hill every year to practice jhuming on a virgin slope and return to the old spots in cyclic order after an interval of ten years. The jhumias of Tripura, unfortunately could not do this because the fear of Lushais prevented them from moving east wards, the only direction where fresh virgin jhum land was available. Hence the hills near their own villages had to be jhumed at an interval of every three years or so, the consequences of which were short crops and recourse to the moneylenders (Hunter 1876: 505). Such inimical relation hampered the collection of taxes also along with failure in production. Thus " during the years 1871 and 1872 hardly any taxes were levied, — first on account of the Lushai raids ; and secondly , on the ground that the men serving as the coolies during the Lushai expedition and with the survey party could not cultivate their jhum, and had therefore no means of paying taxes (Ibid : 510). A good portion of cultivable jhum land in northern part also remained fallow as nobody was willing to shift there due to the fear of repetition of Lushai raids. In the annual report of 1872, the political Agent reported regarding the utilization of land in the northern part that, " most of the available lands was, however, until recently, exposed to constant raids from the Lushais, and never been used ".(Ibid. :492). In the Southern part also, where the land was admirably suitable for jhuming, vast stretches of hill slopes had for year been deserted, owing to the occurrence of Lushai raids and the fear of their repetition (Ibid.: 493).

Besides the house tax and land revenue collected from the hills and plains subjects respectively the forest was a major source of income to the rulers. They leased out forest as Mahals and levy in kind (*Tolls*) on the forest produces were collected. The forest revenue continued to increase over the years and this drew the attention of the then rulers. They passed, for the first time, the Forest Regulation Act. in 1887 to protect certain species of trees. A reasonable area of forest was declared

as reserved where jhum cultivation was made a penal offence. In the memorandum of that Regulation it was mentioned that, " whereas it has come to notice of the administration that jhuming near the Sal forest causes great harm to the trees, the following rules are hereby framed in 1297 T.E, dated 9th Falguna :

1. None can do jhum within an area of half drona distance around the Sal forest.
2. Divisional officers and the sal forest guards will dully inform the content of clause 1 to the hill people and particularly to those who live near sal forest.
3. If after the notice has been circulated, any body practices jhum in the prohibited area, then he may be criminally prosecuted under the Penal Code and be punished with rigorous imprisonment not exceeding six months and also be fined up to one hundred rupees.
4. The officials responsible for the protection of the sal forests shall take special care to this effect, and if any fault is found with them, they may also be prosecuted criminally.

After that an area of 251 square kilometers was demarcated as reserved and 9858 square kilometers as open forest in the year 1908-09 (Saigal 1978: 45-46). Thus in the first quarter of the present century in 1915-16 -the revenue from the forests exceeded the land revenue. In that period Rs.3,72,477 was collected as forest revenue and Rs. 3,51,814 as land revenue. The rulers were then more interested in the forest and declared more areas as reserved. Thus by 1946 a total of 2637 square kilometers forest area had been declared as reserved and jhum cultivation was made a penal offence there (Ibid.: 45-56).

The Bengalis who had settled down on the plains, achieved much progress in cultivation and raised the revenue of the state which inspired the rulers. The plains " where the cultivation is carried on in the same manner as in Bengal ", wrote Hunter regarding the condition of the plain people, " a peasants holding would be considered a large one if above 15 bighas or five acres in extent; and a very small one if containing only 6 bighas or two acres. A farm of about 12 bighas, or four acres in extent, would be regarded as a fair-sized and comfortable holding. The oxen of the plains

of Hill Tripura are small and ill-fed, and a pair can, with difficulty, cultivate 15 bighas or five acres of land. A husbandman, cultivating a farm of this size, would not be considered to be in such good circumstances as a respectable shopkeeper is; but he would probably be as well off as a man earning Rs.8/= a month in money wages.

The classes cultivating by the plough are not generally in debt, although they do not hesitate to borrow money, especially for any domestic ceremony, such as marriage ".Among the Bengalis, he mentioned, women are never employed in agricultural work especially in field labour, but the children occasionally take part in the work of cultivation. But among the tribes like the Tripuris, Kukis etc., women and children are largely employed in agriculture (Ibid.: 505).

Being encouraged by the increase in revenue through plain-land cultivation, the rulers intended to compel the hill people too to take to plain land cultivation. Thus in the memorandum of the first jhumia settlement scheme in 1888-89 it was mentioned that, " most of the hill people conform to their traditional habit and practice shifting cultivation instead of producing paddy by ploughing with the help of cows and buffaloes. From this cultivation often they are not able to raise enough of paddy and other grains; at the same time, because these people are not accustomed to produce crops by the method of ploughing, the speedy reclamation of waste lands is not taking place; consequently there has not been much improvement of the state and the welfare of the subject, the following rules are hereby framed to introduce plough cultivation among the hill people " (quoted from Misra 1976: 67).In that memorandum the administrators namely the Magistrates and Police Superintendents were directed to call chiefs of every tribal village and properly explain to them the usefulness of plough cultivation and advice them to adopt such method.

The administrators, in that memorandum, also directed to appoint, as per necessity, experienced Bengali plough cultivators to teach tribals regarding settled cultivation. Provisions of some other facilities, like financial assistance for purchasing bullock, cow and other agricultural implements, setting up some model agricultural farms etc, were also provided in the scheme (Ibid.).

The steps to restrict jhuming and settle the hill tribes on the plains were taken primarily with a view to increase the revenue of the state making the

hills free for forestry and, at the same time, for utilizing waste plain lands. It was not solely intended to rehabilitate the hard pressed jhumias to wean them from jhuming to some other economic activities specially in settled cultivation. We are not aware of the after effect of such efforts of rehabilitation on the tribes of Tripura. Most probably such effort failed to show any remarkable development. Thus in 1908 the Imperial Gazetteer (vol.xiii : 120) reported that, " the nomadic tillage, known as Jhum cultivation, is almost universal even though attempts have been made to induce the tribals to adopt plough cultivation." The step especially to rehabilitate the jhumias through settled cultivation, however, was taken during 1931-32 when an area measuring 110 square miles in the northern sub-division of Khowai was declared as tribal reserve area. A restriction was imposed within those areas to all kinds of transfer like gift, sale, lease etc. of land to any non-tribal members. Thus we may say that no sincere thought was given to an immaculate rehabilitation plan for the tribals till 1931.

Due to utter poverty of the jhumias large number of families were every year exempted from payment of the family tax. In 1874-75, for instance, 1914 families were exempted in the state excluding the population of Kailashahar sub-division (Hunter 1876 : 510). This gives us some idea regarding the degree of indigence in the hills. Besides, customary habit of drinking liquor and use of the same in huge quantity during socio-religious activities were also a reason which increased the degree of poverty of the tribals in the state. The local liquor commonly known as Langi (in Molsom : Zukola) and country liquor locally known as Chuak or in Molsom Rakzu, are prepared by, as stated earlier, fermentation and distillation of rice mixed with some leaves, bark and roots of some jungle tree. One Ser (a little less then one kilogram) of rice yields one bottle of fermented liquor (Ibid.: 501). And it is estimated that a jhumia family needed on an average at least about 400 bottles of liquor in a year in normal situation that is without any occurrence like marriage or death when a huge quantity of liquor was needed to celebrate relevant rites and rituals, which required a minimum of 400 kilograms of rice for preparation of liquor. This also added a dimension to the economic crisis of the tribals. Besides, traditional practice of sacrificing domestic animals in various rites, rituals and ceremonies also added yet another dimension to the economic crisis of the tribals.

The poverty of the jhumias in the increased land-man ratio is reflected in Saigal's estimation. " It has been estimated ", mentioned Saigal (1976:58), " that shifting cultivation is capable of supporting a population of only 20 per square mile. To ensure a reasonable standard of living for all the jhumias, therefore, we need an area of more then 7,500 square miles. But the total area of the state is only 4,106 square miles. "

Dr. Gangully (1969 : 23-25) has also estimated the carrying capacity of land in jhum cultivation. While discussing the method of estimating the carrying capacity of land he quoted from Mr.Colin Clark and said that " in his `The condition of economic progress' Colin Clark has made a comparative study of the density at which a primitive population can live under different forms of primitive means of subsistence. `The density at which a primitive population can live, has been approximately estimated. Expressed as adult males per square kilometer, Ratzel's estimate designate the following range of possible density :

Primitive agriculture in settled village	:	0.6 — 2.80
Primitive herdsman.....	:	0.25 — 0.60
Shifting cultivation.....	:	0.06 — 0.25

Shifting cultivation has thus least capacity among the different primitive forms of production , to support population per square kilometer. One form of finding out the efficiency of any method of cultivation is to calculate not simply by finding out the average requirement of land to support one person (or a consumption unit) if he depends on shifting cultivation alone on the basis of one operation only, that, after one operation, a jhum plot will remain fallow for a certain number of years, will have to be taken into consideration. William Allen calls it cultivation factor which is 'merely an expression of the number of garden areas required for each type to allow of the complete cycle of cultivation and regeneration normally practiced on that type under the system to which the calculation applies. Area of land required to support consumption unit under the system is worked out by multiplying cultivation factor by the average area of land required for producing one year's subsistence, requirement of a consumption unit calculated on the basis of the actual results.

" On the basis of the normal requirement of rice per consumption unit" , continued Ganguly regarding the condition of the jhumias, " it is found

that if the jhumias consume the whole quantity of rice produced in the jhum and exchange sesame, cotton and gouge for rice then they are able to drive their subsistence for four months only from their jhums. Besides jhum products, each and every jhumia family has its own poultry and piggery; they also collect various forest products free of cost. During the rainy season which is the most difficult period for the jhumias many of them precariously live on various wild roots, leaves and bamboo shoots collected from forests.

"In Tripura", mention Ganguly, "a particular plot of land is jhumed only once and then left fallow for about ten years for regeneration of forest. Hence the cultivation factor is 11. As 49.81 hectares of jhum provides 178 persons with 4 months' subsistence, 0.84 hectares of such jhum will be just enough to provide one full years' (twelve months') subsistence for one consumption unit. But the same plot of land is not jhumed every year. In other words, to calculate the land carrying capacity, we have to take into consideration the cultivation factor which is 11. Hence the net area required per consumption unit under jhuming will be 9.24 hectares (0.84 X 11). Every year approximately 20,238 hectares of land is jhumed which means that this form of cultivation can support about 2,200 souls only. This shows the utter inadequacy of the system today."

So the economic wretchedness of the Molsoms, which they experienced especially before adopting the settled cultivation, was not an isolated event; it was the situation faced by all the hill people especially the jhumias of the state. The main factors responsible for the crises in economic life of the Molsoms may be summed up as follows:

a). Increase of hill population through immigration due to the encouragement of the then rulers with a view to increase revenue.
b). Decrease in availability of jhumable hill areas as a result of reserved forest declaration.
c). Inter tribal conflict due to which the jhumias were not in a position to move freely from one place to another for search of suitable jhum land during a jhum cycle.
d). Natural calamities which decreased production in jhum.
e). The habit and custom of excessive consumption of local alcoholic liquor.

f). Sacrificing of domestic animals during rites, rituals, ceremonies etc. socio-religious activities and some other causes.

The Molsoms were, as stated earlier, mainly concentrated in and around the Udaipur sub-division of South Tripura. Before adopting settled cultivation, as the Molsom themselves stated, they had to cultivate a single plot of hill land for three or four years ceaselessly. Because, due to increased land-man ratio, the causes of which have been discussed earlier, there was a scarcity of suitable fallow slope where the Molsoms could shift during a jhum cycle. Such type of ceaseless plain hill top cultivation is known as *Tang* among the Molsoms. That the Molsom practiced ceaseless jhuming on a particular hill slope for three or four consecutive years may be evident from the course of migration and duration of stay on a homestead area. In normal shifting economy, as mentioned earlier, the jhumias shift to new homestead areas when they have to move to fresh hill slopes during jhum cycle. But for the Molsoms ever since the first part of the present century the duration of stay on a particular homestead area became increasingly longer. Since the first decade of the present century - around 1903-04 — they breached their normal practice. For instance, the villagers of Kalabon Molsom Bari changed their homestead area only five times during a period of 31 years.

Table-6

Duration of stay in homestead area of the inmates of Kalabon Molsombari

Sl.	Name of place	Distace from the previous place (in K.M.)	Year of living	Year of leaving	Duration of stay
1	Herma Bari	—	1903	1906	3 years
2	Sandal	9	1906	1910	4 years
3	Mirja Bari	8	1910	1916	6 years
4	Tapardhum	5	1924	1934	10 years
5	Kalabon Molsom Bari	6	1934	Still living	

Source : Interview from old villagers

From the above table it may be seen that the villagers of Kalabon Molsom Bari had been staying for three years continuously at Herma Bari; for four years at Sandal; for six years at Mirza Bari; for eight years at Tuidhum; for ten years at Tapardhum and now they have been staying ever since 1934 at the present place of settlement.

The plain hinterland of Udaipur sub-division were predominantly inhabited by the Bengalis, most of whom were settled cultivators. They used to reclaim and make arable new waste lands and thus they kept on increasing their holding. The plain land was taken up under Jangal Abadi Lease . The usual conditions of such lease was were that the land was to be rent free for a period of four to ten years, according to the nature of the jungle; then it was to be subjected to a rent at the rate of 2 or 3 Annas per bigha gradually increasing till it reached a moderate amount, which did not yet equal the rate paid for adjoining lands in government territory (Hunter 1876 : 505).

So when the jhumias were struggling hard for the minimum requirement, the plain people were going on increasing their production by making arable new and new waste lands. And thus by the first part of the present century the economy of the plain cultivators reached some sort of solvency.

The interaction between the Tripura tribes and Bengalis had been prevailing since long. Most probably the interaction started in the market places which is traditionally known as Haat . " In the early years of the eighteenth century trade and commerce flourished even in the interior areas of the state. ` Udaipur, the capital of Tripura, was a very big market town. Bengali traders maintained permanent shops there. The tribals who lived in the hills, not far from Udaipur, used to come regularly there for purposes of buying and selling. Paddy and cotton were the main commodities sold by them. Arum plant and its root, guard, watermelon, ginger, potato -these were the other commodities brought by the tribals to the market for sale (Tripura Buranji 1962 : 22).It may not be irrelevant to point out that the claim of Ganguli (1969: 37-38) that the tribals (Jhumias) of Tripura were constrained to consume whatever they produced and thus they were left with nothing to exchange or sell is a sweeping generalization not based on facts. Udaipur, in fact, was one of the oldest market places of the then Tripura. As early as in C.1660 (Rajmala (ed) 1967 : 80-81), the then king Gobindamanikya purchased as mush as

2000 mounds of salt from a trader and the salt was consumed not only by the people living in Udaipur but also by the other people who were living in the interior places.

It was during the reign of king Ratnamanikya that the Bengalis started coming from adjoining British India to settle in South Tripura especially in and around Udaipur. At that time 4000 Bengalis had settled in four places, namely Rangamati, Ratnapur, Jashpur, and Hirapur of South Tripura (Sen Kaliprassanya (ed) 1926: 69). In fact that was the first settlement of the Bengalis in Tripura. Numismatic sources testify to the fact that Ratnamanikya was the ruler of Tripura during the period 1364-67 and that the Bengalis settled in South Tripura during his reign. From this it may be said that the Bengali settlement in Tripura is dated from 1364-67. Another important wave of plain migrants, who were Bengali (Muslim), also settled in and around Udaipur in 1728 when Tripura passed into the hands of the Murshidabad (Misra 1976 : 21).

It is worth mentioning that the migrants from the plains were settling down in and around the Udaipur, the Molsom who had also come to the region some time earlier were moving from hill to hill practicing jhuming. As a result, the Molsoms, along with other jhumia tribal groups, were in economic hardship. Whereas the plain settlers, on the other hand, were in better position -they could at least produce some surplus to manage their minimum demands.

The plain settlers were in need of engaging hired labours in their agricultural operations especially for making the fallow land arable and for cutting the jungles. Some of the Molsom were engaged as hired labours along with other local tribal groups. Though at the out set they were engaged for cutting of jungles only, in course of time, they were used in other agricultural activities like tilling of land, ploughing, planting of paddy shoots, weeding, harvesting etc. Such sort of experiences and training in settled agricultural work made Molsoms interested in cultivating some Lunga lands near their settlement. Generally the Lunga land is naturally fertile as the natural manures from the nearby hillocks accumulate on the Lungas having been carried away by rain water. As a result, though in the beginning they could not follow the proper methods of wet cultivation, the yield was very much satisfactory compared to the yield out of Jhuming at that period. They then, got interested in cultivating the Lungas which were nearer their settlement areas in a large scale. As

a result of this a good number of jhumias started withdrawing from the jhum sector. It is worth mentioning here that the availability of fallow Lunga near their settlement was one of the vital factors which facilitated such a change and helped in adopting settled cultivation. At present the families who are practicing jhuming as their primary occupation, have been practicing this due to non-availability of cultivable lungas or other plain lands, and not because of their liking.

The non availability of fellow plain land, in fact is the biggest hindrance faced by the state government in rehabilitating the jhumias since the beginning of the forth five year plan. Thus while formulating an approach regarding the problems of the jhumias for the purpose of ascertaining the fund requirements of the state during the forth plan it was mentioned that not much of plough-cultivable waste land was left in Tripura. And as a consequence it would not possible to settle the remaining jhumias on plain land (Misra 1976 : 106).

That the techniques of using plain lands for agricultural purposes were diffused to the Molsom from their Bengali neighbors due to close interaction between the two communities may be evidenced by the fact that the agricultural implements used by the Molsoms in settle cultivation are the common ones used by their Bengali neighbors. In fact these implements such as Langol (plough), Moi (lodder), Joal , Kodal (spade) Dao (hand chopper), Tukri etc. have no Molsom terms to denote them. These are the names used by the neighboring Bengalis.

So, to sum up, the major causes which helped the Molsoms to adopt the method of settled cultivation were contiguous settlement of the Molsoms with the Bengali plain land cultivators which facilitated diffusion of technique of the settled cultivation from the Bengalis to the Molsoms; presence of some common market places locally known as Haat which helped close interaction between Molsom, along with other tribals, and Bengalis. In this regard it is worth mentioning that the common market places have a vital role in the socioeconomic changes experienced by the Molsoms . Regarding the nature and functioning of the market especially in socioeconomic changes Areuserg (1934 :1,5) wrote that " the market, like any central ceremony of a culture, is also a channel of cultural and social changes" . The availability of fallow plain land near the settlement area of the Molsoms, as mentioned earlier, was one of the most vital reasons for this change. It is found in the present study, that

the Molsoms who are still practicing jhum cultivation, have been doing so due to non availability of cultivable fellow plain lands.

Another factor which might have helped in bringing about such a change is the psychological change among the Molsom, as also among some other tribals of Tripura, which may have been caused by some political organizations. In this regard it may be worth mentioning that from the first part of the present century some sort of leftist organizations have been active among the Molsoms as among the other tribes of Tripura. A strong organization of Gana Mukti Parisad (GMP) formerly known as Janashikshya Samiti , led by tribal leaders like Dasharath Deb Burma, Sudhannya Deb Burma and some others, was deep rooted among the Molsoms. In fact, the tribals of Tripura were already organized under some sort of a progressive political ideology even when the state was a princely kingdom. This is rather unique for the tribes of Tripura. Later on the Marxist ideology and communist movements developed some sort of an adaptability in the mental make up of the Molsom as well as in that of some other tribal groups of the state, which helped them to cope with the new situation. " When people are confronted with new opportunities ", wrote Foster (1973:130), " acceptance or rejection depends not only upon the basic cultural articulation, a favourable pattern of social relations and economic possibility, but also upon pychological factors".

Inheritance of property

The property in the Molsom society is inherited by son or son-in-law depending on the condition that the son or son-in-low resides permanently with the extended family. If a son-in-law, after marriage and completion of Samak Ahangte, resides permanently in his father-in-law's house, he gets a share of his father-in-law's property; but if he returns to his parent's house and resides there permanently, he does not get any share of his father-in-law's property but gets a share of his parent's property. None is allowed to enjoy the property of father and father-in-law simultaneously. A person loses right over his father's property when he enjoys the property of his father-in-law and vice versa.

In a traditional Molsom society, especially in jhum economy, the inheritance of property actually means the inheritance of cultivation right of the land but not the right of permanent possession. Because, in traditional jhum economy a land is collectively owned by the village group under the control of the village council. And such ownership of a particular land is for a temporary period of two or three successive years when a household of the group cultivates, as mentioned earlier, as much land as can be managed by it's members. So no land is needed to be allotted separately to a son-in-law as he gets it for cultivation in normal course along with the other members of the household of which he is a member. Beside the cultivation right on jhum land in such a society, other movable material properties are not of much I importance so far as inheritance is concerned. Because, other artifacts are mostly made of the local materials like bamboo, wood, cotton etc. which are easily available and every adult of their community knows how to make these.

Arts and Crafts

In Molsom society every household is, more or less, self sufficient so far as making of domestic utensils and production of other essential materials are concerned. Most of their utensils are used in multiple activities and only a few utensils are used to meet all the needs of a household.

The skill in arts and crafts constitutes a major part of one's culturally transmitted qualities in his society. Some sort of division of labour, based on sex, is found in the practices of arts and crafts. Basketry, bamboo, cane, and wood-crafts are usually practiced by the males and loom weaving is done by the females. It is tabooed for a man to weave cloth and that for a women to practice basketry and wood crafts. If women practice cane crafts and men loom weaving then, as they believe, they would be attacked by tiger. On the other hand, a Molsom female, who does not know loom weaving, and a male, lacking the knowledge of cane-crafts, are considered to be lacking essential qualifications for marriage. In fact, a good craftsman or weaver has got some special status in his own society.

Basketry, bamboo, wood-crafts, cloth weaving and making ornaments are the components of arts and crafts practiced by the Molsoms. Baskets such as *bem* to carry rice, paddy etc., *tuikok* to carry water pots, *kaichaning* to carry jhum seeds, *rebom* to keep hen and other bamboo made articles like *lakhu* the rain shield, *reloi* the bamboo plate for drying

crops, *wareng* the hammock, *sukmul* or flute, *chalphu* the small conical basket used for preparing alkaline water, *shei* the local javelin, *tthalphel* the bow and arrow etc. ; wooden articles such as *sum-sarhil* the local pestle and mortar, *sarinda* and *chongpreng* the local musical instruments and some other things are, as stated earlier, made by the male.

In dresses, the female dresses are more colourful than those of the males. *puenzel* the waist garment and *risa* the breast garment are two female dresses woven with colourful cotton threads. The width of the *puenzel* is found in two sizes—from waist to knee and from waist to ankle. The waist-to-ankle size *puenzel* is just double in length of the waist-to-knee size *puenzel*. This limiting down of the size of *puenzel* to only two sizes is necessitated by the fact that the maximum length of the cloth woven for the purpose cannot go beyond the size of the full stretch of arms by the weaver. *Takbrok* the male waist garment, *pardari* the loin cloth and *lukum* the turban constitute the male dresses of which *takbrok* is widely used, *lukum* is used occasionally during social visit or in ceremonies and the *pardari* is mainly used during work time.

During winter, *ponpui* the worm cloth is used by both men and women. Traditionally all male dresses are white in colour but some colourful threads are used specially for weaving *takbrok*. Some common designs are followed in weaving *ruenzel* and *risa*. Dying is performed by the females and traditionally only three colours, namely, red, yellow and black are used in weaving these two garments. The three colours are extracted from local roots *rulum*, turmeric and seeds of a local tree respectively. But nowadays ready made coloured threads are used for the propose. Ceremonies are performed, as mentioned earlier, when a boy or a girl wears cloths for the first time.

Another essential art for the female is the making of local beverage and local alcoholic liquor namely *zukola* and *rakzu*. In fact, the brewing of the high quality *zukola* is treated as an additional quality for the female in Molsom society.

A variety of ornaments are worn by the Molsom women on their nose, neck and ears. *Naper* and *toia*, the ear rings, are put on the lobe and upper part of the ear respectively. *Noth* the nose ornament is put on the bridge between the nostrils and *ruthoi* the necklace is used around the neck. All the ornaments, except *ruthoi*, are made of silver or brass,

and the *ruthoi* is made of the seeds of wild bananas locally known as *matchi*. Nowadays the necklace are made of beads also. Except *ruthoi* the Molsom do not know the technique of making any other of these ornaments. These are collected from the plain people.

The technique of iron smelting is not known to the Molsom. They also do not know the making of iron implements. The iron implements like hand chopper and sickle which they use in every day life are purchased from the Bengali blacksmiths. In fact iron smelting and making of iron implements are unknown to the other tribal communities of the state as well. The Khashis of Meghalaya used to smelt iron (Hunter 1879:) but it is not found among the Khashis residing in the state of Tripura.

With the change of traditional production system namely, jhum cultivation, a scarcity of raw materials especially for loom weaving, has occurred. Cotton, from which cotton thread is made, is scarcely available now as this was earlier produced only in jhum land. But, jhuming nowadays has been limited to production of food stuff only. At present cotton threads have to be purchase from the market. Previously they used to dye cotton threads with indigenous colouring agents but at present the cotton threads which they purchase from the market are already coloured in factory or elsewhere and this has limited down the practice of local dying. The ready availability of cotton threads of various colours has introduced novelties in motif and design affecting, in the process, the traditional designs of their cloths. Besides, availability of cheaper garments, especially the second hand garments coming from America and Japan via Bangladesh, has crippled household weaving.

The shortage of labour force in the craft sector has also hampered the household weaving. Settled cultivation is labour extensive, and as crops are cultivated almost through out the year, the manpower of the community is absorbed in agriculture throughout the year. Thus manpower stands withdrawn from crafts. Another factor that has led to the withdrawal of man power from crafts is their lack of knowledge in making implements which they now use in settled cultivation. Since, a major portion of them have now taken to settled cultivation by largely giving up jhuming they have to buy the artifacts like plough, loader, Pokhai, the hand implements used in irrigation, etc. from the local markets, crippling down their craft which provided them implements for jhuming.

Chapter -5

Social Organisation

Family

The family and kinship form the most important structural blocks of a society. Their significance is great especially in case of a tribal society where these ties are usually stronger. In this chapter we have taken up an analysis of the family and kinship ties which are found in the Molsom society. We shall first discuss the type of families in existence among the Molsom and then analyse their kinship and clan structure.

Table : 7

Distribution of the families of the sample villages according to their structure

Type of family	Number	Percentage to the total amilies of the sample villages
Nuclear family	236	73.74
Extended family	66	20.65
Other type family	18	05.61
Total	320	100.00

On the basis of the relationship among the members Molsom families may be categorised broadly into three types: Nuclear, extended and other types. Each of these categories has been discussed separately in the following sections in this chapter.

Nuclear family

A nuclear family consists of husband, wife and their children. There are mainly three reasons found among the Molsoms behind the formation or continuation of a nuclear family. A nuclear family may form, due to separation of spouses along with their children, if any, from the extended family after the completion of Smackachangte of a husband; or secondly, due to death of parents in an extended family resulting in separation of

brothers from each other; or thirdly, due to separation of spouses from their natal houses after love marriage.

In our sample villages out of a total number of 236 nuclear families 25.42 percent have been formed due to the first reason mentioned above, 12.71 percent for the second and 61.86 percent due to the third cause. The genealogical structure of a nuclear family may be diagrammatically presented as follows :

Table-8

Distribution of nuclear family based on cause of formation.

Cause of formation	No. of families	Percentage to the nuclear families of the sample villages	Percentage to the total families of the sample villages
By separation of spouses from netal house after love marriage	146	61.86	45.62
By separation of the spouses from houses after Samakachangte	60	25.42	18.75
Du to death of the parents of the spouses	30	12.72	09.37
Total	236	100.00	73.74

Table - 9

Distribution of the extended families of the sample villages based on causes of cause of formation

Cause of formation	No. of families	Percentage to the total expended families of the sample villages	Percentage to the total families of the sample villages
Marriage of son	30	66.67	13.04
Marriage of daughter	9	20.33	03.61
Marriage of both son & daughter	6	13.00	02.61
Total	45	100.00	19.56

Extended family

Among the Molsoms an extended family may be described as the combination of more then one nuclear families and is formed through marriage of its member or members, especially children. Thus a nuclear family may become an extended family through marriage of a son or daughter or both son and daughter. It may be pointed out that the extended family through marriage of a daughter is formed due to the existing system of Smackachangte where, as stated earlier, a husband stays, for a prefixed period, with his father-in-law's family after marriage; and a family becomes extended through a son when, the son with his wife and children if any, reside with his parents after smackachangte or love marriage. And when these two cases occur simultaneously it takes the shape of an extended family through both son and daughter. In our sample villages a total of 66 families are found to be of the extended type, of which 63.64 percent are formed due to the marriage of the son, 21.21 percent through marriage of the daughter and 15.15 percent through the marriage of both son and daughter. The genealogical structure of these type of extended families may be diagrammatically presented as follows:

Extended through both son and daughter.

Other types of family

Besides nuclear and extended families described above, there are some families found in our sample villages which were formed under some special circumstances and are discussed under the heading "other type". Three such types have been found so far. In the first type an unmarried daughter is found living with the nuclear family of her brother; in the second type an widower is found living with his married daughter; and in the third type an widow is seen living with her married daughter.

Regarding the Molsom families it may be mentioned here that for a certain period every family has a chance to be shaped in any type of nuclear or extended family. A nuclear family, for instance, consists of husband, wife and their children—son and daughter. Now after the social marriage of a daughter, this family has a chance to become an extended family for the period of Smackachangte of the son-in-law; it would take the shape

of another type of extended family if the son of this family along with his wife resides with the parents after the completion of Smackachangte or after love marriage; and a third type of extended family may emerge if the two cases mentioned above occur simultaneously. The change of a Molsom nuclear family into various types of extended families may be diagrammatically presented as below :

Nowadays, the preference of the Molsoms is shifting towards the nuclear and extended through son type of families. This is because of the higher incidence of love marriage, preference of spouses to reside in neolocal house and reduction in the period of Smackachangte due to which a son or son-in-law returns to his parents house or from a neolocal house. Earlier when the period of smackachangte was of longer duration, there was every possibility that the son-in-law would have to continue to reside with the family of his father-in-law. In our sample villages as many as 73.75 percent of the families are nuclear and 13.12 percent are of extended through son type.

Kinship

As kinship is the product of family and a family begins through marriage, the Molsom kinship may be divided into marriageable and non marriageable categories. According to the Molsom marriage rules, a male cannot marry his father's youngest sister's daughter and a female cannot marry her mother's elder brother's son. Marriage is permissible among all other kin of the same generation.

Thus a friendly, brotherly and sisterly relation prevailed among the same generation kin and accordingly a few kinship terms are in existence to address these kin. Other non-marriageable relatives consist of the members of one's elder and younger generations. The major kinship terms and a list of respective relations covering four generations namely, one's own generation, parent's generation, grand parent's generation and children's generation are cited below:

Table -10

Relationship and kinship terms among the Mlsom covering four generations

Relationship	Kinship terms
A. Elder male members of one's same generation such as: 1. Elder sib brother, 2. Father's brother's son,	
3. Father's sister's son, 4. Mother's brother's son, 5. Mother's sister's son and all such others	*Kudod.*
B. Elder female members of one's same generation, such as: 1. Elder sib sisters, 2. Father's brother's daughters, 3. Father's sister's daughters, 4. Mother's brother's daughters, 5. Mother's sister's daughters, and all such others:	*Yeite.*
C. Younger male members of one's same generation such as : 1. Younger sib brothers, 2. Father's brother's sons, 3. Father's sister's sons, 4. Mother's brother's sons, 5. Mother's sister's sons & all such others :	*Naupa.*
D. Younger female members of one's same generation, such as : 1. Younger sib sisters, 2. Father's brother's daughters, 3. Father's sister's daughters, 4. Mother's brother's daughters, 5. Mother's sister's daughters & all such others:	*Naunu.*

E. Husband	*Lompa*
F. Elder sister's husband	*Upa*
G. Younger sister's husband and wife's elder brother	*Waipa.*
H. Wife	*Nupui.*
I. Elder brother's wife	*Unu*
J. Younger brother's wife & wife's elder brother	*Wainu.*
K. Wife's younger brother :	*Palarangnu*
H. Wife's youngerbrother:	*Palarangpa*
Kinship Terms Of One's Parent's Generation:	
1. Father, wife's father & husband's father	*Kupa*
2. Mother, wife's mother & husband's mother	*Kunu*
3. Mother's elder brother & father's elder brother	*Kapater*
4. Mother's younger brother	*Kanasa or Kungpa*
5. Father's younger brother	*Kupungak*
6. Father's elder sister & mother's elder or younger sister	*Kuipuiter*
7. Father's younger sister	*Kini*
8. Father's sister's (both elder & younger) husband & mother's sister's (both elder & younger) husband	*Kumrang*
Kinship Terms One's Grand Parent's Generation:	
All male members of one's father's father & moth father's generation	*Pu*
All female members of one's mother & father's mother's generation	*Pi*
Kinship Terms Of One's Children's Generation:	
1. Son	*Kosapo*
2. Daughter	*Kosanu*
3. All male members of one's children's generation	*Sapo*
4. All female members of one's children's generation	*sanu*

Interrelationship among the kins:

The interaction pattern among the Molsom is largely guided, as stated earlier, by their marriage rules. The behavioral pattern among those who are marriageable and those who are not could be differentiated. The members of the same generation mix among themselves freely. While mixing with the members of opposite sex, the use of jokes and, at times, sex related talks are common. A joking relation is also permissible with ones brother's wife and sister's husband. Among the people of the same sex the code of expected conduct is friendly and, at the same time, brotherly or sisterly. At times, especially when a number of young males court a common girl in Leang, some rivalry may develop, but that does not last long and ultimately friendly relation prevails. During customary rites of thread wearing and puberty initiation namely Takbrokmi, Punmizel and Risabomb, the free relation among the opposite sexes of the same generation takes a ceremonial shape. The joking relations with ones sister's husband and brother's wife help in socialization especially regarding sex knowledge and sex-life. The members among whom marriage is tabooed behave with each other as brothers and sisters. Customarily they are not permitted to attend Leang, thread wearing and puberty initiation rites of their brother or sister's kin.

All members of one's parent's generation both of father's and mother's side, are respected as parents and the behavioral code is like also that of parents-child relationship. The members of this generation act as agents of socialization in all spheres of life for the kin of their children's generation. The behavioral patterns with the members of one's grand parent's generation is of affection and joke from the grand parent's side and respect and joke from the grand children's side.

All members of a Molsom village, in one way or the other, are related to one another and in most of the cases overlapping of many relations occurs. Such overlapping of relations takes place due to occurrence of marriage among a wide range of kin especially of the same village. The relationships among the members of Kalabon Molsom Bari, one of our sample villages, are presented in the latter

portion of this chapter. Such an exercise will show how all the families of a village are related by kinship ties.

In Kalabon Molsom Bari, it has found that out of a total of 42 households only six family-heads were married outside the village and the remaining 36 family-heads got married to the members of the same village. In the table given below a marriage chart stating the nearest matrimonial relations of the family-heads who married within the village, is worked out. For the convenience of preparing this chart, we made numbering of all the households serially. The last household on the right side (from the entrance of the village) has been marked as number one and then other households have been numbered serially up to the last household on the left side (from the entrance of the village). After that the relationship, especially the nearest marital relation of a family head with the other family heads are traced and represented in the table placed below. Besides, we have also worked out diagrammatically a relation-structure based on the relationships which are in existence among the members of the Kalabon Molsom Bari. The head of the household number 13 is taken as our ego.

Table : 11

Relation of ego with other family head of the village:

House number of Respective family-head	Sex	Age group (senior of junior to ego)	Relation with ego	Kinship term
1	2	3	4	5
1	F	Sr.	Mother's father's brothers daughter	Kupungak
2	M	Jr.	Mother's father's brother's son's son	Naupa
3	M	Jr.	Father's sister's son	Naupa
4	M	Sr.	Mother's father's brother's son	Kapater
5	M	Jr.	Father's sister's son	Naupa
6	M	Jr.	Mother's father's brother's daughter's daughter's husband	Waipa
7	M	Jr.	Mother's father's brother's daughter's daughter's husband	Waipa
8	M	Sr.	Mother's father's brother's daughter's husband	Kumgrang
9	M	Sr.	Mother's father's brother's daughter's husband	Kumgrang
10	F	Sr.	Mother's father's brother's son's son's wife	Kini
11	M	Sr.	Mother's father's brother's son's son	Kudod
12	M	Jr.	Sib brother	Naupa
13	M	Self(ego)	—	—
14	F	Sr.	Mother	Tarpi
15	F	Sr.	Mother's father's brother's daughter	Naunu
16	M	Jr.	Wife's father's father's brother's son's son	Naupa
17	M	Sr.	Wife's father's father's brother's son's son	Kudod

18	M	Sr.	Mother's father's sister's daughter's husband	Kumrang
19	M	Sr.	Mother's father's sister's daughter's son	Kudod
20	M	Sr.	Father's sister's husband	Kumrang
21	M	Jr.	Younger sib brother	Naupu
22	M	Sr.	Mother's father's brother's son	Kamasa
23	M	Sr.	Mother's sister's husband	Kumrang
24	M	Sr.	Mother's sister's husband's brother	Kumrang
25	M	Sr.	Mother's father's brother's daughter's daughter's husband's mother's brother	Kamasa
26	M	Sr.	Mother's father's sister's daughter's son	
27	M	Sr.	Mother's father's sister's daughter's husband	Kumrang
28	M	Sr.	Mother's father's sister's daughter's husband's brother	Kamasa
29	M	Jr.	Sib sister's husband	Waipa
30	M	Sr.	Mother's younger brother	Kamasa
31	M	Jr.	Wife's father's brother's son	Naupa
32	M	Sr.	Wife's father's brother	Tarpa
33	M	Sr.	Wife's elder brother	Kudod
34	M	Sr.	Wife's elder brother	Kudod
35	M	Sr.	Mother's father's sister's younger son	Kamasa
36	M	Sr.	Mother's father's sister's elder son	Kapater
37	M	Sr.	Mother's father's sister's husband	Kumrang
38	M	Sr.	Mother's father's brother's daughter's husband	Kumrang

39	M	Sr.	Mother's father's brother's son	Kapater
40	M	Sr.	Father's sister's husband	Kumrang
41	M	Sr.	Father's brother	Kapater
42	M	Sr.	Father's brother's wife's sister	Kupuiter

Thus a Molsom village is self-sufficient so far as the supply of brides and bride-grooms is concerned. A Molsom child, as a consequence, is diversely related to the kin of his or her father's and mother's side. Such self-sufficiency in marriage place and diversity in relations occur, as stated earlier, due to wide range of marriageable relatives especially within one's own generation. In case of Kalabon Molsom Bari, for instance, the family head of the household number 41 is ego's father's brother who is also ego's wife's mother's sister's husband (see the diagram showing village genealogy). In case of kinship terminology, the head of the household number 41 is ego's Kapater if the relation is considered through ego's father's side. But that person is ego's Kumrang also if the relation is considered through his wife's side.

The clan

The Molsoms are divided into twelve clans. In Molsom dialect clan is known as *punchi* .The names of these clans are *singer, mapu, lengman, uisha, achep, nompor, lungthung' nokham, tuisung* and *ronte*. Every clan has one head man known as *pungifang* . These clans are not totemic. In fact, they are not able to trace the progenitor of their clans. However, they believe that the names of these clans originated due to some special work-activities of the head of these clans. These clans are neither exogamous nor endogamous—selection of mate, for marriage, is open among the members of all clans. The children inherit the clan of their father and the clan of a women remains unchanged after marriage. There is a belief prevailing among the Molsoms regarding the origin of the names of these clans which is stated below:

In Arshiemkhosak of Bolpuitang, as per their hearsay, the Molsoms had been residing on twelve adjacent villages. The dwellers of each settlement area were under the supervision of a headman who maintained solidarity among the dwellers and maintained connection with the Kamchikao, Suprai and other leaders of the community who look after the affairs and problems of the people of respective settlement.

In course of time, those twelve villages had merged into one due to extension of homestead areas of every village as a result of increase of population. This sort of merger had created some problems in identifying the village people in respect of respective village and their separate headman. To solve this problem the Kamchikao and Suprai had decided to give a name to each of the settlement heads on the basis of the type of works he had done during the day time on a particular day.

One evening, they called all the heads of the twelve settlements to a meeting at the house of Suprai and asked about the type of work they had performed during the day time. Accordingly, the twelve heads reported their deeds one by one and Kamchikao and Suprai gave a name to each of the respective heads by which the other people of their settlement were identified. The head of one village reported that he had repaired a supporting pillar of his house locally known as *deo*. And thus that headman and the people of his village were named *deorai*. Another head told that he had done nothing but eaten chicken and drunk *zukola*. That head and his village people, thus, were named *singer* owing to the fact that a wild cat which is in Molsom known as *singer* does nothing but eat flesh. The third head said that he and other adult members of his family had cleared the jungles surrounding their house. That head and all people of his village were named *mapu* . In Molsom *ma* means courtyard and *pu* means large. The head of the fourth village reported that he had visited some of his kin's house and therefore he and his village people were named *leangman*. In Molsom *leang* means to visit. The fifth village head informed that he, along with other people of his village, had eaten the flesh of a dog mistaking it a deer, which had incidentally been burnt in jhum-fire. The head and other people of the village therefore were named *uisha*. In Molsom *ui* means a dog and *ashak* means to eat. The head of the sixth village reported that during the day he had punished a person of his

village who had done some unfair deeds. In Molsom, punishment is known as *ron* therefore the village head and his people were named *ronte*, that is, the person who impose punishment. The head of the seventh village told that he, along with some youths had constructed round their village a boundary-wall of bamboo with pointed end. That head and his village people were named *sungfun*. In Molsom *sung* means pointed end and *phun* means sharp. The head of the eighth village reported that he had made a hearth on the floor of his dwelling house. That head and his village people ere named *lungthung* as in Molsom, a hearth is called *lungthung*. the leader of the ninth village told that he, along with youths of his village, had been detained by the people of a neighbouring village who doubted that they had burnt down some of their houses, although they were not the actual culprits. The people of that village had pinched them as a form of punishment and after that they were released. The people of that village and their head were named *achep*. In Molsom *achep* means pinching. The head of the tenth village reported that he had taken his launch on an unclean leaf. He with his village people were named *nompor* . In Molsom *nom* means leaf and *por* means unclean. The head of the eleventh village said that he, along with some youths of his village, had burnt the house of a person to teach him a lesson, for the man had done some unfair deeds. The people of that village and their head were named as *nokham* in Molsom *nokham* refers to a person who burns house. The head of the twelfth village reported that he had supplied water to the house of the Kamchikao. He and other people of his village were named *tuisung* . In Molsom *tui* means water and *sung* means to supply.

Thus we find that names of the clans among the Molsom are in clear departure from the practices followed in other tribes, based on activities and not on some gods and goddesses that might have been worshipped in ancient days or based on some other totemic things.

Besides the stories narrated above, we do not have any other sources from which the origin of the names of the Molsom clans could be verified.

Chapter – 6

Authority Structure in the Molsom Society

The conduct of the members of the Molsom society is regulated through three-fold authority structure, namely the family authority structure, the village authority structure and the community authority structure. The present chapter aims to discuss, in detail, about the composition and functions of the authority structure at the three levels and to interpret their significance for the maintenance of the social order of the Molsoms

Family authority structure

Among the Molsoms the conduct of the members in the family is regulated and the socio-economic and politico-religious activities of the family are looked after by the head of the family. Normally the oldest male member heads the family and his wife acts as his assistant. After the death or otherwise invalidation of the head, the next oldest male succeeds him. This new head could be the eldest son or eldest son-in-law (in case the family has no son or the eldest son has been staying with his father-in-law's family). In case the family has no adult male member the wife of the head takes up the responsibility.

The head represents his family at the village and community level affairs such as selection of the village chief and other members of the council and attends the village meetings called by the village council. He looks after the economic and socio-religious activities of the family. In shifting cultivation he is to choose the jhum-field to be cultivated by the family and has to take decision about the variety of seeds to be sown in the jhum-field. Land and other property of the family are kept under his control.

Table-12

Distribution of the family-heads of the sample villages on the basis of relation with other members of the family.

Relation of the head with family members	Total no. of family	Percentage to the total no. of families of the sample villages
A husband to wife, father to children, father-in-law to son-in-law & daughter-in-law	283	88.44
Elder son of a deceased head	23	7.19
Wife of a deceased head	13	4.06
Son-in-law of a deceased head	1	0.31
Total	320	100.00

The family authority structure of the Molsoms is, more or less, akin to that of the other tribes of the state with the exception that, after the death of a head among the Molsoms his eldest son-in-law is also entitled to succeed him. In the villages where a sample survey has been conducted for the present study, it has been found that 1.87% of family heads are the eldest son-in-low of the deceased heads, 7.19% are their eldest sons and 2.5% are the wives of the deceased heads.

The village authority structure

The conduct and affairs of the Molsoms at the village level are regulated and directed by the village council which also looks after the socio-economic, politico-religious and other activities of the village people. The village council of the Molsoms consists of the *Khuoulm* or Chaudhury that is the village chief, the *Khandolloom* who is the assistant to the village chief and the *Khamdoltoum* the messenger. Two youth leaders namely *Tangoaloulm* the leader of the boys and the *Nungyakoulm* the leader of the girls of the village, also help the council when necessary. Besides the above secular structure, there is another one-man religious institution consisting of the *Awchai,* the priest of the village, who, when required,

helps the council in the magico-religious aspects of the problems under trial.

The village council of the Molsoms is, more or less, akin to that of some other tribal communities of the state like Reang, Tripuri, Koloi, Uchoi etc. though, of course, with some differences. Among the Reang and the Tripuri the village council consists of four members namely Chaudhury, Achai, Karbari and Khandol (Gan Chaudhury 1983 ; Deb Burman 1983:64). But among the Ucohis only two members namely Chaudhury and Karbari constitute the village council (Deb Burman 1963 : 30) while the village council of the Kolois consists of three members—one Chaudhury and two Khandols where no Karbari or Achai is found (ibid.). The village council of the Molsoms, as we have already mentioned, consists of three members—Khuoulm, Khandolloom & Khandoltoum - but occasionally they are assisted by three others i.e. the leader of the male and female youths and the village priest.

The members of the Molsom village council are selected by the villagers in a formal meeting. First of all the village chief the *Khuoulm*, is selected which followed by the selection of the assistant of the chief the *Khandolloom*, and the messenger or the *Khandoltoum*. In the selection of the *Khandolloom* and *Khandoltoum* the preference of the newly selected village chief gets some priority. While selecting the *Khuoulm*, some religious rites are observed by the village priest. But such rites are not performed in selecting the other council members.

All the family heads and some other adult male members of the village assemble in a meeting and choose a person from among the family heads of the village for the post of *Khuoulm*. Usually an aged and brave man with remarkable hunting records, who is also considered intelligent and economically sound, having many young males in the family, is preferred. In the traditional jhum economy, economic status of a person is measured by the number of adults in his family. It is so probably because in jhum economy the land is a community property looked after by the village council; and a family is allowed to cultivate as much land as it can manage by its members. So, naturally, greater the number of adults a family possessed wider the stretch of land it is allowed to

cultivate resulting in higher production. But in settled economy, a person's economic status is measured by the cultivable landed property he possesses. The criterion that the head of a family which has a number of adult males is generally selected as the village chief probably owes its origin to the fact that the personal family life of the village chief would be disturbed as he would have to remain engaged, most of the time, in the activities of the village council and thus he would be constrained to detach himself from the economic and other management activities of his family. The other adult males, in such cases, can look after the family and economic activities.

For selecting the Village chief at first, the name of a person is proposed by any of the heads of the families and if that name finds favour with the majority of the people assembled there for the purpose and if the person also is willing to take up the responsibility then the Awchai of the village arrange for a test to find out whether the choice is auspicious.

He sacrifices a hen to the *tuisangro* deity and removes the elementary canal of it. He then conceives of the elementary canal as divided into two parts namely the mouth-adjacent part, which is presumed to fall on God's side, and the rectum-adjacent part, which is considered as belonging to man's side. The village priest then checks up whether there is any damage spot on the elementary canal. If any spot is seen on the part supposed to belong to God then no problem arises; but if there is any spot on the rectum adjacent part or simultaneously on both the parts then the selection of the village chief is supposed to be ominous and in that case the villagers propose another name.

After the selection of *Khuoulm*, other members of the council namely *Khandolloom* and *Khandoltoum* are selected by the village people. The personal qualities and the other criteria for selection as *Khandolloom* or *Khandoltoum* are the same as those for village-chief selection.

Distinct work divisions is found among the council members. *Khuoulm*, the head of the council, exercises supreme power in the council. He negotiates various socio-economic, politico-religious and other disputes and problems faced by the council. In traditional jhum economy the *Khuoulm* is to choose the jhum-field and settlement area where the

villagers would shift during the jhum-cycle. He is to collect subscriptions from the villagers and arrange annual *Sangrak* and *khoser* worship. Besides, the *Khuoulm* represents the village in the inter village affairs and in selection of the members for the community council.

The *Khandolloom* is the assistant to the *Khuoulm*. The *Khandoltoum* is the messenger who also arranges for *Dabo* the smoking implement during meeting of the council. The *Khandoltoum* also implements the physical punishments imposed by the council. Usually the house of the *Khuoulm* is used as the office of the council. During council meetings the *Khuoulm* may take the help of any adult villager to solve the problem under trial.

The *Tangoaloulm* and *Nungakoulm* are selected by the youths of the village in a formal meeting. An expert hunter, having remarkable knowledge in craftsmanship and music, is preferred to be the *Tangoaloulm*. Similarly, preference is given to expert weaver, or to those having special skill in preparation of local alcoholic beverage , dance and music, for selecting *Nungakoulm*.

The *Awchai* is selected in a formal meeting called by the village council where all heads of the families assemble. Personal qualities and other criteria for the selection of Awchai are almost the same as those for the selection of a *Khuoulm,* with the exception that the person, in addition, must have a specialised knowledge of the magico-religious rites and rituals. Though this religious institution is not directly a part of the village council, yet in the arena of village administration, it works along with the council. The Awchai performs all Pujas arranged by the families or village council and is entrusted with the duty of treatment of diseases by performing magic or Pujas. He helps the village council with his knowledge and ideas about the magico-religious aspects of the problem under trial. The Awchai represents the village, along with the other council members, in selecting the members for the community council. Besides, he has to perform religious rites and tests during the selection of Khuoulm of the village council. In return of the Awchai's service, the village people cultivate his land for one season in a year. The general activities of the Village Chief are confined to the concerning village only.

The Tangoaloulm and Nungakoulm make inquiry about the problems especially relating to premarital sex and violence and place the report before

the council. Besides they lead the youth team during the customary mutual exchange of labour, and other youthful group activities.

There is no fixed tenure of office for the members of the village council, at the same time, it may not be life long. It fully depends on the working efficiency of its members. Whenever the village people find incompetence in the activity of the council, they dissolve it in a general meeting of the villagers. Besides, if any member or members of the council feel himself or themselves in any way incompetent to perform duties, he or they may resign. But if the Khuoulm resigns, then the other members of the council have also to resign because the latter do not have any executive power of their own. However, they may be re-elected in the next council meeting. In case the other members or member, except Khuoulm, resign no change takes place in the overall structure of the council; only the post which is vacated with the resignation of the respective member, is filled up by selecting another suitable person in a formal meeting of the villagers.

The working tenure of the one-man religious institution namely the Awchai is life long but not hereditary. The Awchai can resign only if he feels himself in any way incompetent to perform his works. The Tangoaloulm and Nungakoulm are relieved of their office when they get married.

To regulate the behaviour and affairs of the individual in the different aspects of life and for sustaining peace, some laws, customs or norms are prevalent in the Molsom society, which are expected to be abided by the members of the society. The village council is vested with the power to impose fines and punishments if violation of such lows occur. The amount of fines and the forms of punishments vary with the nature of the offence. Fine in cash or kind, torture, excommunication etc. are the customary punitive action. Some of the existing laws and related forms of punishments to be imposed against the violators, are cited below.

Table – 13

Forms of offence	Nature of fines/punishments
Premarital sexual relation	Rs.45/- & one earthen pot of Zukola
Conception by a girl before marriage.	Rs.45/- & one earthen pot of Zukola and one bottle of country liquor (these are to be given by boy) besides, the boy will have to marry the girl.

Marriage of a girl before initiation of Risabomb ceremony	The parents of the girl are fined Rs.45/-
Courting a person whose marriage has been socially settled.	The accused person is to compensate the amount which has been spent for settling the marriage.
Marriage between tabooed relations.	The couple fined with Rs.45/-, one earthen pot of Zukola, excommunicated for a period and has to arrange a feast after the period of excommunication.
Adultery	The adulterate is fined with Rs.120/-, one earthen pot of Zukola and five bottles of Rakzus.
Community exogamy.	The convicted person is fined with Rs.45/-, one earthen pot of Zukola and excommunicated for a period fixed by the Council and has to arrange for a community feast after the period of excommunication.
Divorce	The person seeking divorce is to pay an amount of Rs.130/-, and an earthen pot of Zukola.
Killing of wild animal which is already trapped by some one else.	The convicted person is fined with an amount equivalent to the cost of that animal or he has to give an animal of the same species and same size with a fine of Rs.5/- and an earthen pot of Zukola.
Trespassing into or entering a village or going out of the village on the day of annual Sangrak or Khoser worship.	The convicted person is fined with an amount which has been spent for arranging respective worship (the concerned worship is to start newly).

Besides the laws mentioned above there are some norms prevailing amongst the Molsoms which are expected to be followed by the member of their society. No fine or punishment is imposed for violating such norms, but a

norm breaker is condemned by the village people. Some of these norms, for instance, are cited below.

1). If anybody takes the help of physical labour of any person or persons the former is expected to return the labour when the later is in need of the same . Such mutual exchange of labour, in Molsom, is known as Ron.

2). A big game is expected to be distributed among all the households of a village, whether it is hunted in group hunting or by an individual.

3). Every household of a village is expected to give subscription for the performance of any rite, ritual, ceremonies etc. arranged by the village council.

4). In the holy day of Sangrak or Khohser worship, nobody from the village is expected to work in Jhum or other's land.

5). At least one adult member from each of the household of the village is expected to take part when the villagers customarily cultivate the land of the Awchai for one season a year.

Community Council

The community council of the Molsom is consisted of eleven members namely the *Kamchikao*, the head; *Awchai*, the priest; *Yaksung* and *Khuksung*, the assistants; *Sangialean* and *Sangiatoum*, the messengers; *Sangkanta*, the executor of corporal punishment; *Okma*, the tobacco maker; and *Modi*, the zukola supplier.

The members for the community council are selected by the Khuoulms, Awchais and some other influential members of the Molsom villages. The selectors gather together in a formal meeting, usually in the house of ex-Kamchikao and select the members for the community council. At first, in the process of selection, the Kamchikao, the head of the community council, is selected which is followed by the selection of the Awchai, Chapialian, Chapiatoum, Yaksung, Khuksung, Sengialian, Sangiatoum, Senkanta, Okma and Modi respectively.

The personal qualities and other criteria for choosing a person for the post of Kamchikao are the same as those which are considered in the case of selecting the chief of the village council. The method and

other formalities observed for selecting the Kamchikao are also akin to those observed during the selection of the village chief.

After the selection of the Kamchikao, the Awchai is selected. A person with sound religious knowledge along with other personal qualities, which are taken into account for selecting the Kamchikao, is considered for the selection of the Awchai. Besides, the Awchai is selected from the village which is adjacent or nearer to the village of the Kamchikao. The new Kamchikao and Awchai, along with other assembled members, then select the other members of the community council. The same criteria, as are followed in selecting the Kamchikao, are followed for selecting the other members of the council as well. But no religious rite is performed for selecting them. The members like Chapialian, Chapiatoum, Sengialian, Sengiatoum, Okma and Modi are generally selected from the village of the Kamchikao or from the adjacent villages for smooth running of the council.

After all the council members are selected, the Kamchikao assumes the office formally when the *Silungket* , the magical test-stone used for identifying a sinner, is handed over to him from the outgoing Kamchikao. This Silungket is believed to be preserved from Bolpuitang, the original place as they believe, of their inhabitation.

Clear hierarchy and functional division are there among the members of the community council. The Kamchikao acts as the chairman and exercises supreme power over the council members. He gives the final decision in solving the problems faced by the council; constitutionally he controls all activities -economic, social, political, religious etc. of the community as a whole. The hierarchy follows downward to the Awchai, Chapialian, Yaksung, Khuksung, Sengialian, Sengiatoum, Sengkanta, Okma and Modi respectively.

The Awchai acts as the religious advisor to the Kamchikao, helping him with his magico-religious knowledge in solving the problem under trial. Besides, the Awchai performs the Sangrak and Khoser worship and other rites, rituals, ceremonies etc. arranged by the community council.

Chapialian and Chapiatoum act as the deputy chiefs of the community council. They are assisted by the Yaksung and Khuksung. Sengialian

and Sengiatoum communicate the decisions and other information of the community council to the village councils. They invite the members of the community council to attend council's meeting whenever necessary. Sengkanta executes corporal punishment conferred to a guilty by the community council. Okma and Modi arrange for and serve tobacco and liquor during the meeting of the community council.

Usually the problems which remain unresolved in the trial of the village council are placed before the community council. This council tries to resolve problems in two ways. It sends its representatives the Chapialian and Chapiatoum to the village council from where the dispute has been originated. The Chapialian or Chapiatoum on behalf of the council, tries the case in a meeting arranged by the village council and settles the problem. Secondly, the community council solves the problem in a formal meeting in the house of the Kamchikao.

If any dispute remains undecided after the trial in the court of community council then the Kamchikao takes the matter on his hand and solves it with the help of the silungket the magical test-stone . The Silungket is put on the palm of the accused person and if the person fails to keep the stone on his hand the charge brought against him is taken to be established. The Silungket, as they believe, would hot up on the hand of a guilty and a real sinner would not be able to keep the stone on his hand; on the contrary, it would remain cool on the palm of an innocent person. But the Silungket is rarely used for judgment as most of the problems are settled in the trial of the community council. The forms and measure of fines and punishments exercised by the community council are mostly the same as those imposed by the village council with some little differences in the severity of the corporal punishments.

Besides looking into intra-community affairs, the Kamchikao also represents the community in inter community affairs. He used to represents the community during the customary annual tribal gathering of the state which was traditionally held at the palace of the then Maharajas and was known as Hasam Bhojan.

The working tenure of the community council is not fixed and, at the same time, it is not life long for any of its members too. It depends, as in

the case of village council, on the performance of the office-bearers or the violation of norms by council members, especially by the community chief. If the people of the community feel that the existing council has lost the efficiency expected of them they can dissolve the council in a formal meeting. Besides, the Kamchikao or any member of the council may resign if he feels himself unable to run the office competently. Any termination of the Kamchikao results in the dissolution of the council as a whole. But when any other member of the council resigns, no change occurs in the over all structure of the community council; but the vacant post is filled up by selecting a suitable person in a formal meeting of the community council.

Changes

Over the years, no major change has taken place in the structure and functioning of the village and community council of the Molsom except for the relaxation of some traditional laws. For instance, the village council or community council, nowadays allows community exogamy with a minimum fine of community feast only. At present their community council gives permission to the people of other community to become Molsom. The interested person, in such a case, has to arrange for a community feast. The convert is allowed to choose any clan he likes but he is to declare his choice before the council with a promise to obey all the existing laws, norms, customs, beliefs, values etc. of the Molsom society.

The secular and religious components of the authority structure of the Molsom have some sort of separate identity so far as its frame work is concerned. The secular part is vested with actual power and it occupies higher status in the hierarchical strata. Thus the village chief in the village council and the Kamchikao in community council head the power structure whereas the Awchai forms an essential auxiliary body. Such separation in the structure does not interfere in the functioning of the council .Rather some sort of diverse affect is found so far as some of its activities are concerned. The Awchai, for instance, acts as the main determinant in the final selection of the village or community chief. A person cannot be selected as the village or community chief if the religious test of the Awchai proves ominous.

The Effect of the Panchayati Raj on the Traditional Authority Structure

Introduction of Panchayati Raj in the Molsom villages, along with other hill villages of the state, has opened a new channel which facilitated the involvement of the Molsoms in the main stream of state'sadministration. Though there was a Territorial Council and Molsoms also took part in electing the members of that Territorial Council before the introduction of the Panchayati Raj, yet that institution did not have much effect on the village or community level authority of the tribals. It is, however, admitted that some new traits were introduced in the political behavior of the members of the tribal community, especially when the system of election was introduced, in place of selection, for constituting the Territorial council. Since that time processes like secret ballot voting, canvassing, participation of all adult males in the processes of selection etc. have been brought in to use. Besides, since that time, the Molsom females, along with the females of the other tribal communities, for the first time, started participating in the election process. But all those new things were confined only to their behavioural pattern and made no impact on the functioning of their self government namely village or community council. It was the Panchayati Raj which penetrated into the functioning of the traditional village and community councils of the Molsoms.

However, it can not be said that the two authority structures are contradictorily related to each other. Rather, the relation between the traditional self-government and modern village panchayat is more or less, one of cooperation. Both authorities have their own influence over the people and have separate functional jurisdictions.

The problems related to sex and violence, marriage, divorce, adultery, disputes regarding Jhum lands, problems related to religious activities etc. are tried by the traditional authority. Whereas the problems concerning land, health and sanitation, education, communication etc. are dealt with by the village panchayat. In some cases especially in case of a serious or long pending problem, the traditional village council and village panchayat hold the trial jointly. Besides, the village panchayat, whenever necessary, also takes the help of the traditional village council.

It may be pointed out that problems which the village or community council deal with are traditional in nature so far as their origin is concerned. On the other hand the problems which the village panchayat handles are created in the new situation, that is, in the settled economy. As stated earlier, the traditional shifting economy of the major sections of the Molsoms has been changed into settled economy and as a result, the land which was the property of the community in the shifting economy, has become individual family's permanent property. Therefore, the nature of land disputes which occur nowadays, are mainly related to the right to possession of land. The records of these permanent lands are maintained by the agencies of the state government. Other problems which the new authority covers, in fact also have their origin in the permanent settlement. The homestead area in shifting economy, as mentioned earlier, shifted from place to place along with the shifting of Jhuming from one Jhum land to another during a Jhum cycle resulting in most temporary settlement pattern. The communication, in such temporary settlement, does not develop due to the fact that once a pathway is made it is used only for three or four years successively, that is, as long as Jhuming and settlement continues in that area; the pathway is abandoned when the Jhuming shift to some other place. This absence of the need of a permanent type of settlement and a permanent type of road and other communication system in a shifting economy left construction of roads etc. out of the purview of the activities of the traditional village council. Activities like these have now been taken up by the village panchayats without any encroachment into the activities of the traditional village council.

CHAPTER - 7

Rites of Passage and Social Control

Birth

After an expectant mother has passed three or four months of conception the Molsoms observe *Sapalang reboul* or *Kabeng* rite for good health of the mother and coming baby as a protective measure against evil's eyes and to prevent abortion. In *Sapalang reboul* the Awchai worships four supernatural spirits, namely Tuior, Asengoi, Thingkungoi and Paoenpa by sacrificing seven chicks and three piglets. For Kabeng the same spirits are worshipped but no pig is sacrificed. Kabeng is observed, generally by those who are relatively poor as it is less expensive than sapalang reboul . After *Sapalang reboul* or *Kabeng* rite is performed the Awchai forecasts the sex of the coming issue by observing the position of the rectal cecum on the elementary canal of a sacrificed chick. Down ward of the tip the rectal cecum portends a female issue whereas an up ward position is supposed to signify a male embryo.

Among the Molsoms the pregnant women are to observe some restrictions. They are forbidden to sleep with their husband after seven months of conception and they are to keep covered their breasts by breast garment locally known as Risa especially when they go out side the house. They believe that an evil spirit called Khuri does harm to the breast of the pregnant women with it's malicious look. If the worst befalls, symptoms appear in the shape of breast pain and, some times, with cracking of nipples. To get rid of the evil, the Awchai worship Khuri by offering boiled rice and curry made of seven vegetables. Besides, the expectant mother is to avoid filthy places where, as they believe, the Khuri lives and may take possession of the mother. If it so happens, the women in the familyway may lose mental balance.

When the delivery pain starts, a labour-room is contrived in the house with sheets of cloth, bamboo mats etc. The Awchai worships Tuior and Arkhonthace on the back of a stream or river by sacrificing one duck or

hen for easy delivery and as a protective measure for the mother and the coming baby against evil eyes. The Awchai also forecast the time of delivery, that is, early or late and the health of the issue by examining the elementary canal and the colour of the blood of the sacrificed animal respectively. The shorter the distance between rectal caecum and rectum, earlier is the expected time of delivery, and more deep-red the colour of the blood of the sacrificed fowl the better would be the health of the issue. If the colour of the blood is found to be blackish the issue, it is believed, may die before or after delivery.

In the labour room the expectant mother sits on the delivery bed made of bamboo mats, rests on her knees and catches tightly a post or a rope slung from a beam of the roof. At the time of delivery a local midwife and her assistant, locally known as *Kurma* and *Lauromi* respectively, and some other elderly ladies attend the woman. The assistant of the midwife and some other elderly ladies hold the mother steady from behind and the midwife pulls the baby out.

On the umbilical cord five knots, each at a distance of one inch from the other, are tied with cotton threads. The midwife cuts the umbilical cord at third knot with a sharp bamboo split locally known as *Saranat* . If a son is born the split is obtained from a bamboo post of the house and in case a daughter is born it is taken from a horizontal split of the bamboo wall of the house. The umbilical cord of a son is cut by keeping it on the handle of hand chopper of his father and that of a daughter is cut by placing it on an weaving equipment locally known as *Khuroi*, of her mother. Juice of some local leaves is used to check bleeding. Placenta is put in to an earthen pot or in a pot made of dry pumpkin and the father of the baby places the pot on a bamboo stand in a nearby jungle. The midwife, her assistant and other ladies who attend the mother during the delivery are entertained with *zukola*.

After the last part of the umbilical cord is removed, generally four to six days after the birth, *abursuk* ceremony is observed when naming of the new born is done. The Awchai worships the *Arthengoi* by sacrificing one hen and than selects one from two or three names proposed by the baby's relatives. He takes two leaves and drops them from above uttering the

proposed name. If both the leaves fall with the same side up he rejects that name as it is supposed to be ominous. When the leaves fall with opposite side up, that is one dorsal and one ventral, it signifies that the name is auspicious and the baby is named after that name.

The names are usually chosen after local birds, flowers, remarkable incidents or happenings which might have occurred at the period of birth. A person of Manithang Bari of udaipur, for instance, was born in 1952 and has been named Kuminist Pada as the communist movement had entered the region during that period or a girl of the same village is named as Ration laxmi since at the time of her birth a ration shop was set up near their village, and so on. Most of the names of the present generation are corrupted form of the names prevailing among the neighboring Bengalis. For example, the Bengali name Rupabati is adopted as Rupaiti, Laxmi as Likhi, Pradip as pudip, Kamal as Kumal etc. Two names bhagya and Bahadur, are widely used. A few examples especially among the male are Saran Bhagya, Ninda Bhagya, Aprut Bahadur, Nago Bahadur and so on.

On any evening, within one month after the birth of the baby the Awchai worships *Mukotcung reboul* at doorsill by sacrificing one young pig and a chick. This is done as a protective measure against diseases for the new born. If Mukotkung reboul is not performed within one month, the evil spirit Khuri, it is feared, will cast an evil look on the baby and the baby will vomit repeatedly. Within one year after the birth, the Awchai worships *Prosenpoi* deity by sacrificing three hens which, they believe, will help the new born to learn speaking at an early age.

Up to four or five months the breast feeding is the main source of food for the baby. When the child grows up to one year, he or she is provided with normal meal. The mother and other elderly relatives keep the baby on their laps or on the hammock. During the work time the ladies tie the baby at their back with a short piece of cloth made especially for the purpose which is locally known as *ponai*.

The Molsoms observe ceremonies during the first wearing of cloths. The wearing ceremony for the boys is known as *takbrokmi* and that for the girls as *punmizel*. Traditionally they do not wear dresses except warm

clothing in winter before solemnization of wearing ceremony. In *takbrokmi* a boy for the first time wears *takbrok*, the traditional male dress, and in *punmizel* a girl puts on *punmizel* the traditional loincloth for the first time in her life. At an early stage of this initiation, the parents invite some young boys and girls to their house. Generally the ceremony takes place in the evening when the parents leave the house. The boy and girl invitees assemble in the house where they drink zukola and do merriment. The boys help the boy or girl to put on a new piece of loincloth. The boy or girl whose Initiation goes on, generally tries to oppose but the other boys forcibly make him or her wear the garment. From this very day the boy or the girl starts wearing dresses.

Childhood among the Molsoms is passed cheerfully. They play indigenous games and get training in various socioeconomic activities. The adolescent boys and girls keenly observe various activities of their parents and other elderly persons. The boys gain knowledge of bamboo, cane and wood crafts, agricultural works, hunting, fishing etc. and the girls gain skill in weaving, agricultural works and other domestic activities. Sometimes they participate in some minor works like rearing of animals, weddings, collection of firewood etc. in groups.

Puberty

Among the Molsoms a ceremony is observed when a girl steps into puberty. The ceremony is known as *risabom* . After first menstruation *risabom* ceremony is performed when a girl wears *risa*, the breast garment, for the first time in her life . In presence of many boys and girls, during *risabom*, two strong boys tie a new piece of *risa* around the breast of the girl. The other parts of this ceremony are same as that of *Punmizel* ceremony. The boys with whom the marital relation of a girl is tabooed are interdicted from attending the Risabomb ceremony of that girl. After risabomb a girl is formally accepted as a young girl or *Nungak* (in their own terminology) by the society and her parents are allowed to arrange her marriage. In Molsom society no ceremony is observed relating to initiation of the boys into puberty.

The cloth wearing ceremony namely *takbrokmi* for the boys and *punmizel* for the girls and the puberty initiation ceremony for the females namely *risabom* are unique of the Molsoms since they cannot be found among the other autochthonous tribes of the state. Among the Mogs of Tripura, however, *sangpareebui*, the adolescent ritual for the males and *ranglangsa* , the puberty rite for the females, are observed.

The Molsom youths lead a romantic life. They lighten the hard and tedious works of jhum and other economic activities with music and merriment. They participate in all socio-economic activities as and when necessary. In the village the youths are organized under the leadership of Tangoaloulm the leader of the boys and Nungakoulm the leader of the girls.

After the day's work the young boys visit the house of the young girls and amuse themselves there by gossiping. Generally a group of boys consisting of three to six members assemble in a girl's house in the evening. This evening-gossiping in Molsom society is known as *leang*. Traditionally there was a room known as *lingna* or *sungna* in every Molsom house for the purpose. In Leang the girl forms the nucleus and the boys display their special qualities in music, art, craft etc. and try to court the girl. They sing songs, play on the musical instruments, and present bamboo, cane and wooden articles to the girl. The girl offers zukola, tobacco, betel leaf and betel nuts to the boys and observe them keenly. Ultimately one amongst the boys becomes successful in courting the girl and for this the green signal comes from the girl when she expresses her willingness symbolically.

After a period of observation one day the girl sits close to the selected boy and offers a portion of her loincloth to him. The favored boy sits on the extended portion of loin cloth so that the girl is unable to move to attend to another boy's request for preparing smoking pipe, offering zukola, betel leaf etc. From this the other boys present get to know about the affair. No rivalries grow between the selected boy and rejected ones.

A similar type of practice is found among the Lushais of Tripura. The Lushai call it *rim* . In *rim* also, like leang, three to six young boys gossip with an young girl at her house in the evening and try to court the girl. The other things of the *rim* are similar to those of the *leang*, the only difference is found in the symbolic declaration of the girl about her choice.

The girl in *rim* takes a bailo (a cigarette-like tobacco roll made of tobacco and paper) from the boy selected by her and tie the same with her hair and thus makes her choice known.

Pre marriatal sex relation :

Sex relation between the unmarried girl and unmarried boy is not uncommon in the Molsom society. Their society generally overlooks the matter as these relations usually lead to marriage. However, if a complaint comes from any corner regarding a delay in marriage then the village council takes up the case. The council imposes a fine of Rs.45/, a bottle of country liquor and an earthen pot of zukola on the pair. The pair has to declare before the council that they would marry each other soon. If the premarital sex relation results in pregnancy of the girl then the council takes up the case. The boy at first is fined Rs.45/, an earthen pot of zukola and a bottle of country liquor. The boy in this case must marry the girl and he has to declare the date or month of the marriage which should take place before the delivery of the issue. If the boy refuses to marry the girl the village council hands over the case to the court of the community council. To take such a stand, the village council conducts inquiries through Nungakoulm and Tangoaloulm to be sure that the boy is responsible for the girl's pregnancy. The girl's version too is given adequate weight and is treated with some priority. If even in the court of community council the boy refuses to marry, he is punished physically until he agrees to marry the girl. But such instances are rare in their society. Such a problem arises, generally, when two boys are found to have had physical relation with a single girl.

Physical relation of a person with whom his or her marital relation is socially tabooed is treated as a major offence in Molsom society. When such an affair comes to some one's knowledge it is communicated to the village chief and if such affair is proved true the couple is fined Rs.45/, an earthen pot of zukola, and a bottle of country liquor. Furthermore, they have to promise not to involve in such immoral relationship in future. In case the girl is made pregnant by someone tabooed to have sex-relation with her the pair gets excommunicated from the society. The pair also have to pay a fine

of Rs.45/, an earthen pot of zukola and a bottle of country liquor. They are also not allowed to get married socially. Such tabooed biological union, among the Molsoms, is known as *donkir*.

Marriage

The Molsoms are monogamous. polygamy and polyandry are treated as social offence among them. They practice endogamy at the community level. Their clans are neither endogamous nor exogamous. A person can choose his or her mate from any of the twelve clans. After marriage the clans of the spouses remain unchanged but the children inherit their father's clan. Child marriage is not practiced among them, but age for marriage is not fixed. Marriage takes place at any age on attaining puberty. The groom may be younger then the bride or vice versa. But a man, generally, prefers a younger female as his wife and a female prefers an elder mate. Both cross-cousin and parallel cousin marriage are in practice among them with some restrictions on the former type. A person is forbidden to marry his father's younger brother's daughter and vice versa. The marriage between socially permitted relatives is known as *halao ocha* . Both widow and widower marriage are in practice among them. Marriage may take place between a widow and widower or between a widow and unmarried boy or a widower and unmarried girl. The rites and rituals for widow and widower marriage are the same as those of normal social marriage but fewer ceremonies are observed in case of marriage between a widow and a widower. A married person, male or female, uses no sign or symbol to indicate his or her marital status.

Negotiation, mutual consent, elopement and courtship are the usual methods for acquiring mates. As stated earlier, Leang is the customary system for developing courtship. While keeping a vigil of jhum crops the young boys and girls express their mind to each other through love song. Number of pairs are formed during the jhum-watching. Elopement usually takes place in cases of socially tabooed couples or other unions where social marriage is not possible. In most cases of elopement the couple performs *baklak* worship and thus gains a status equal to that of a socially married couple.

For negotiation, at first, a middle man, known as *palai* gives proposal to the girl's or boy's parents on behalf of the girl's or boy's party. The parents and other elderly relatives of the boy and the girl then confer at any party's house and settle an auspicious date for final discussion which is known as *adende*. The *Adende* takes place at the house of girl's parents. On *adende* the parents, the head of the clan known as *pungifang* and other elderly relatives of the boy go to the girl's house with an earthen pot of Zukola. In the girl's house her parents, Pungifang (in case of marriage between members of two different clans) and some other relatives assemble. Having taken a light drink they negotiate and they settle the date of marriage, time period of *samak achangte* (the customary system of staying in the father-in-law's house). the quantity of zukola the groom's party would take with them and some other things in presence of and with an active mediation of the Awchai.

The marriage takes place in the bride's house and continues over a period of four successive days. The first day is known as *tusin* .On this day the groom goes to the bride's house accompanied by his parents, uncles, friends and other relatives with prefixed quantity of zukola. Besides, they customarily bring one pig, five hens, one set of ornaments such as necklace, nose ring, arm, ring etc. and one set of dress including one puenzel and one Risa with them. The bride's party accords a respectful reception to them and usher them to a room where they are offered comfortable seats. The groom's party then hands over the pig and hens to the relatives of the bride who ceremonially kill the animals and cook half of the pork. This pig slaughtering is known as *manrakrin*. Every body then eats, drinks, sings and make merry till all drop to sleep.

The second day's ceremony is known as *pantapui* . Early in the morning the Awchai serially placed four deities namely, Tuisangro, Arthungoi, Thingkungnoi and Samalaimilika on the courtyard. The bride and groom take bath, wear new dresses and come in front of the deities accompanied by their friends. The Awchai then starts worshipping the deities one after another by sacrificing two hens for each. The bride and groom follow the Awchai. They bow their heads and repeat some sacred spells dictated by the Awchai. They then enter in two separate room arranged for them and relax there. A pig is slaughtered and half of the pork and the

hens which are sacrificed in worshipping four deities, are cooked. This pig slaughtering and cooking is known as *noksag* . After *noksag* the bride, the groom, other relatives and invitees have a feast and consume large quantity of Zukola.

In the afternoon the bride and the groom take bath for the second time and put on new dresses. The groom wears Takbrok and puts a turban on his head. The bride puts on a puenzel, a risa and a set of ornaments on her neck, nose and ears. They are then brought into a room where they sit side by side on a bamboo mat. The bride sits on the left of the groom. They project their feet in front. One boy friend of the groom sits on his right and one girl friend of the bride sits on her left. A stone is kept in front of them (nowadays grind- stone is also used). The Awchai worships the Moon and the Sun by sacrificing two hens for each of the deities and pronounces some sacred hymns.

He then puts some sacred water, which was kept after the Tuisangro worship, on the head of the bride and groom and thus solemnization of the marriage takes place. After that the zukola which was brought by the groom's party is distributed among the relatives of the bride and the groom. Customarily, the parents and maternal uncles of the bride and groom get one pot each. The young male and female relatives of the same generation to which the bride and the groom belong get one large pot for each side and the rest is stored for the next day. After distribution of the zukola, all the relatives of the bride and the groom drink, dance and make merry. This may continue through out the night.

The third day is known as *dalani*. In the morning the pork which was preserved after Noksag ceremony is distributed among the parents and the relatives of the bride and the groom. This ceremonial distribution of a meat is known as Antamingsemni . In *antamingsemni*, the front and back leg of the pork is divided into two equal parts which are given to the parents of the bride and the groom. The groom's parents further divide their share into two equal halves and one half is given to the head of the clan and remaining half is kept for themselves. The parents of the bride divide their portion into four equal parts and give a share each to their sons, daughters, and the maternal uncles of the bride, while keeping a share for themselves.

After Antamingsemni all gathered takes part in drinking dancing, singing and in making merriment in whatever way they like till they retire to bed. The fourth or last day is called *oaikbulfulpantate*. Early in the morning of the day the relatives of bride and groom take a light drink and start their journey back home. The groom remains in his father-in-law's house for Smackachangte. Traditionally the period was 25 / 30 years, but nowadays it has been reduced to two to four years. During Smackachangte the bride groom is treated as a member of his father-in-law's family. The father-in-law bears all expenses for running the family of his son-in-law. The son-in-law customarily gets a portion of the agricultural products under his personal disposal. Besides, he may also practice poultry, piggery, duckery etc. personally. The son-in-law shares ideas, experiences and knowledge of his father-in-law during socio-economic activities and thus gets sharing in various spheres of life. In the evening, often, the elderly married males assemble in a house of the village where they discus various problems related to various economic activities, customary laws, norms etc. and drink zukola. The son-in-law customarily follows the father-in-law in such assemblage where exchange of knowledge takes place. After completion of Smackachangte a person is allowed to stay with his wife and children in a separate house on the compound of his father-in-law's house or he may return to his father's family. Here the choice is open to the son-in-law but leaving father-in-law's house before completion of Smackachangte is considered as a major offence.

Case study of an widow marriage :

Sri Madhu Gopal Molsom, a youth of 25 years of Manithang Bari, married Smti. Bijoy laxmi Molsom, an widow of 35 years whose husband , Chandra Manik Molsom, died of illness. Bijoy Laxmi had two daughters by her deceased husband. After her second marriage she had one more son and a doughter. The wife of Madhu Gopal got a service in the Social welfare Department of government of Tripura and was posted at Udaipur township. She got a quarters at Udaipur where she shifted with her husban and children. Their elder daughters (daughters by the deceased husband of Bijoy Laxmi) got admitted to Udaipur Government Girls Higher Secondary

School. At the weekend, they used to visit their village regularly where they had their original house. Bijoy Laxmi was the only government service holder in their village due to which she got some special respect from the villagers.

Adultery

Adultery is treated as a major social offence among the Molsom. The spouse of the adulterous person may claim divorce in the court of the village council. The village council imposes a fine of Rs.120/, an earthen pot full of zukola and a bottle of country liquor along with physical punishment of five whip lashes. However, such cases are rare. During my field works I have not witnessed any such problem.

Divorce

Divorce is socially permitted among the Molsoms provided that the person seeking divorce gives sufficient reasons. Divorce is granted generally, when a charge of adultery is proved. It is also granted on a proven complaint of impotency or non-adjustment of the spouses. A divorce prayed on charges of adultery is generally granted at the outset by the village council after necessary inquiries. But a divorce claimed on the charge of the non-adjustment or impotency is more difficult to obtain. In case of the non-adjustment of the spouses the council at first tries to negotiate by reasoning with both parties and by keeping them under observation for a certain period. If after observation period the person again claims divorce and, at the same time, the council also realizes that the couple cannot adjust with each other then a divorce is granted. The divorce claimed on the ground of mental imbecility is generally granted almost instantly. Resolving the problem is more complicated when a divorce is claimed on the ground of impotency. The village council usually make inquiry about the background of the problem through by friend or girl friend of the husband or wife of the complainer. The Nungakoulm and Tangoaloulm of the village also help in the inquiry. After a divorce is granted the claimant has to pay Rs.130.60 to the council from which the divorcee gets Rs.60 as compensation and the rest of the amount is divided among the council members and the youth leaders of the

village. A divorcee may remarry or remain alone. When the divorcee women cannot sustain herself or her kids her parents take care. Minor children stay with the mother and unmarried grown ups are allowed to live with either of their parents according to their choice.

Death

The Molsoms cremate the body of the dead. But they bury the corps of a child. After death, the body is taken out from the house and is kept on the courtyard. The close male relatives of the deceased person carry the dead body on a bamboo made stretcher, locally known as *Tolai* , to the crematorium where the corpse is laid on a pyre and the Achai and other relatives of the deceased set on fire. After cremation, the ground is washed and boiled rice, vegetable curry and zukola are offered at the crematorium in favour of the deceased. This ritual of offer is known as *busok*. *Meramsi* is observed up to three days by the villagers and seven days by the agnates when they take vegetarian meal. On the seventh day after death *Tuisangro* worship is performed by the Awchai at the house of the deceased by sacrificing a pig. All relatives of the deceased and the villagers attend Tuisangro worship and have a feast. This is known as *samsir* . On the thirteenth day after death *ser* rite is performed when a pig is slaughtered and cooked pork, zukola, country liquor and boiled rice are offered for the deceased . In every month of the date of death the agnates of the deceased offer cooked pork, boiled rice and zukola at the crematorium which is known as *zu-thak* The *zu-thak* continues for one year. After the completion of one year the *Besu* rite is performed when a pig is slaughtered and the cooked pork is offered for the deceased and the relatives of the deceased have a feast. The bone-ash are committed to the Gomati river or other holy water after the besu rite is performed.

Chapter- 8

Religious Life of the Molsoms

We shall start this chapter by giving an idea about the world view of the Molsoms. The Molsoms generally believe that the man came to this world from under the earth. Long ago, according to a folk story existing in their society, man used to live under the earth from where they tried to come out but they found no way. Fortunately, after intensive searches, the Kukis discovered a way but they had to stop coming out through that path because as soon as they came over and stepped on the ground, they were killed by a big bird, *rumuluenpa*. By that time, the Molsoms had reached there under the headship of the Suprai and came to know about the mishaps that the Kukis had to meet with. The Suprai took it as a challenge and decided to go out through that opening and to take on Rumuluenpa. He took a bow, some arrows, a shield and his pet dog with him. As soon as he stepped out of the tunnel and stood on the ground on earth, the Rumuluenpa came out, before it could strike the Suprai, his pet dog subdued it and then the Suprai killed the bird by shooting an arrow. In the meantime the leader of the Kuki came out and fired an arrow at the slain bird and claimed that he had killed the bird first. Suprai, hearing the Kuki-leader's claim, got angry and was waiting silently to teach him a good lesson. The Kuki-head went down underground to bring out all members of his community. By that time all Molsoms came out before the Kukis could come out. The Suprai closed the passage with a big stone and thus the Kukis were trapped inside. The Kuki chief then requested the Suprai to open the gate-way. The Suprai told him that if the Kuki chief promised not to claim himself as the killer of Rumuluenpa and not to fight with the Molsoms, only then he would open the gate-way. The Kuki-chief agreed and the Suprai removed the stone opening the way for the Kukis to come out.

The Molsoms believed that earlier the man was immortal and was as powerful as the supernatural forces. There was an Awchai of the Molsoms

who actually, with his extraordinary supernatural power, as they believed, was protecting the human being from death and other dangers. They believed that it was Asengoi, the god of death, who made the man mortal. In this regard there is a myth which goes on as follows.

Asengoi tried hard but failed to make human being mortal, because the Suprai could make alive everyone whom Asengoi had killed. Being tired of his failure, once Asengoi asked the Suprai how he could die. The Suprai told that he would die only of a snake bite. Asengoi then, with his supernatural power assumed the form of a poisonous snake and hid himself under the bed of the Suprai. At night when the Suprai went to sleep the snake bit him. He cried out loudly in pain and the people rushed there. The Suprai told them about the mishap. He requested them to bring some leaves from a medicinal plant. He gave them a dry fish for finding out that plant and told that the dry fish would get its life back after it was touched with that plant. He also warned them that the leaves must be brought before the sun rose, or else he would die by then.

The people went to the forest and started looking out that plant by touching every tree with the dry fish. Finally, they found a tree which brought the dry fish in life. They collected some leaves from it and started for Suprai's house. Asengoi, however, came to know of their endeavour and decided to foil their attempt to save the Suprai. He changed himself into a villager and reported to the people that the Suprai had already died. He then took them to a place where, with his supernatural power, created the illusion that the Suprai's house stood there and the members of the Suprai's family were mourning his death. Thus the Asengoi had put the people in a trance and they believed him. The people threw away the leaves realising that their efforts had gone in vain and they were about to leave the place in guile. But no sooner had they thrown the leaves, their trance was over and they were back to reality. They saw that the house, the dead body of the Suprai and everything else that they were made to see in their illusion vanished. The people then realised that they had been fooled in their attempt to save the Suprai as there was very little possibility to find out another medicinal plant in time because they had no dry fish with them.

However, they rushed to the village to get another dry fish and again started the search. But it was too late as the sun was about to rise. So they could not locate the plant before sun rise and thus the Suprai could not be saved. After the death of the Suprai there was no other Awchai powerful enough to protect the people from the Asengoi and therefore, they believed that from then on man became mortal.

The Molsoms have full faith in the existence of soul. They believe in the survival of soul after death. They cremate the body after death and they have been practicing this since long past. The rites and rituals performed after death namely, Busak, Samsir, Zuthak, Besu etc. may be considered as evidences of their belief in the survival of soul after death. But they have no clear idea or belief about the rebirth of the soul. They believe that the dead ancestor gains some higher supernatural powers and, with these, they can help the living people in time of crisis or to get rid of diseases.

Besides ancestors, some other supernatural powers and spirits are also appeased or worshipped by the Molsom. Some of these powers and spirits, as they believe, are benevolent while others are malevolent by nature. Malevolent powers and spirit are appeased to prevent them from ill doing. Such appeasement, in most cases, is done by arranging for their worship by the Awchai. Benevolent powers and spirits are worshiped in the same manner as the illustrious ancestors are worshipped. The activities of some supernatural powers and spirits and how they came to be worshipped are described below.

Suprai

The Molsoms believe Suprai to be the most powerful ancestor-soul. He was once a great Awchai. According to the myth mentioned above, he had been saving the human beings from death and thus he made man immortal. The Suprai who is worshipped by the present Awchai by sacrificing two hens, can still save the Molsoms from crisis.

Sangrak

Sangrak is also an ancestor soul who was, before death, a great warrior-Molsom. In every Molsom village Sangrak is worshipped collectively

once in a year. The village chief has to arrange for annual Sangrak worship by collecting subscriptions from every household of the village. The village council in a formal meeting fix a date for annual worship of Sangrak as there is no prefixed date for this. Generally it is performed after the winter harvest with the objective of defeating evils — both natural and supernatural ; and as a preventive measure against accidents in jhum activities especially during clearing the jungles and jhum-fire. During Sangrak worship at village level, some restrictions are observed. No outsider is allowed to enter into the village and no villager is allowed to go out of the village on the day of worship. If any outsider enters or any villager goes out, then the worship has to begin afresh. Beside worshipping collectively, Sangrak is also worshipped at family or individual level as and when such worship is considered necessary. Regarding the death of warrior Sangrak there is a myth prevailing in the Molsom society which goes as follows.

There were, long ago, two friends named Goria and Sangrak. Both of them were brave warriors who also possessed some supernatural powers. The two friends were living together in a house where a little girl used to do cooking and other domestic works for them. On attaining puberty, the girl grew so beautiful that both the friends fell in love with her. One day, they expressed their minds to each other but none was ready to sacrifice his love to resolve the deadlock. However, they arranged for a test ultimately and decided that the fittest person would win the girl. The test was to be held in two rounds. In the first round, they were to sharpen their hand chopper on two separate boulders and the person who would be the first to break his boulder into two pieces would also get the first chance in the second round of test in which a supporting pillar of a house which is made of a bundle of Muli bamboo and locally known as *diu* would have to be cut by hand chopper in one stroke. The other person would have to stand close behind the diu so that he too be chopped into two pieces along with the pillar.

Goria won the first round and got the first chance in second round. As per terms of the second round Sangrak stood close behind the pillar and Goria struck it with his hand chopper. But Goria was unable to slash the pillar and hence failed to hurt Sangrak because while sharpening his

hand chopper on the boulder, he had wrongly rubbed the sharp edge holding the hand chopper vertically instead of in a slanting position which is the normal method of sharpening instruments. Due to this the blade of his chopper had got blunt instead of getting sharp. Then came Sangrak's turn. But when the Goria saw the sharpness of Sangrak's chopper he immediately realised that his end was near. He therefore turned and fled. Sangrak gave him a chase but Goria used his supernatural power and sought refuge in the uterus of a pregnant women. Sangrak too used his power and was able to detect where Goria had hidden himself and he removed the uterus of the pregnant women. While doing so he hurt Goria's hip. Goria also struck Sangrak with his hand chopper and injured his leg. Sangrak then become furious and started killing the inhabitants of neighboring village. After some time he came to the bank of a river where he heard a women's voice calling for help in carrying her water pot. Sangrak went towards her but as soon as she saw him she disappeared. He was puzzled by this happening but through his supernatural power he discovered that she possessed the leaf of a particular tree which had any one held it on his head would be invisible. He then resumed slaughtering the villagers keeping such a leaf on his head. After some time, when he had resumed his normal human self, he became thirsty and entered the house of a widow to drink water. The widow knew of his deeds and as soon as he entered her house she crippled his leg with one stroke of an ax. Sangrak became crippled and was also unable to move. The widow called the villagers and asked them to slay Sangrak. Accordingly, the villagers attacked Sangrak but all they could do was only to injure him, for killing him was beyond their power. Sangrak requested them not to torture him any more because his death would come only when he wished to die. He then told them to bring a piece of wood. They took a piece of wood and Sangrak carved out his own image on it. After having done so, he died voluntarily but his soul entered the wooden image. After some day, he appeared in the widow's dream and told her to worship the image. The widow refused, but Sangrak kept on persuading her in dreams. Notwithstanding Sangrak's insistence the widow persisted in her stubbornness not to worship his image. Sangrak then turned dream into nightmares, but the widow still remained steadfast in her

resolution and did not relent. Sangrak, however, realized that the widow would not give in. He then requested her to hand over the image to the Molsom. The widow then gave it to the Molsom and since then, as they believe, the Molsoms have been worshipping Sangrak.

Napangoi

Napangoi is a female spirit believed to reside in the forest. It can make one ill by possessing one's body or just by casting its fearsome looks. The symptoms of such illness appear usually with high temperature accompanied by headache and pain all over the body. In some cases, it causes delirium to the patient. To get rid of such evil spirit and its evil look the Awchai worships the spirit by sacrificing two hens or one pig. The process of worship, however, varies from case to case depending on the nature of symptoms. If delirium continues for a long period then it is considered that the Napangoi has dominated the soul of the patient and is trying to take possession of the patient permanently. In this case the Awchai, in addition, worships Sangrak by sacrificing two hens or a pig to drive out Napangoi. In fact, any type of mental imbalance is considered as possession of the patient by Napangoi.

Asengoi

The malevolent male spirit, Asengoi, as stated earlier in the folk tale related to mortality of human being, is believed to cause one's death. The Awchai worships this spirit, in case of serious illness, by sacrificing two hens or a pig to prevent the death of the patient.

Kolopaoen

The kolopaoen is also a malevolent male spirit believed to reside in an old abandoned house. In the evening, as they believe, it comes out of its residence and moves around everywhere. If anybody, especially a child, comes on its way it possesses the body of that person and causes illness. The symptoms of such illness are rise in body temperature and shivering. The Awchai appeases Kolopaoen through worship as a remedial measure for such illness by sacrificing a hen preferably in the evening. There are some trees which are believed to be the dwelling places of Kolopaoen.

Tuior

This is a female spirit believed to live in water. It inflicts, if gets hold of one's body, illness in the form of loose motion, stomach pain, and rise in temperature. The Awchai appeases it through worship by sacrificing a hen in a stream or river.

Khosher

Khosher is worshipped once in a year praying for an overall development of the people of the Molsom village. The date of the worship is settled in the meeting of the village council in presence of the village priest. Some regulations are observed on the day of the worship. No one can enter the village and none can go out the village area on the day. None is allowed to do an cultivation work on *jhum* or other land. The violator of these regulations is to be punished and the nature of punishment is decided upon by the village priest. Some decorated bamboo splits are placed round the boundary and alongside the gate-ways of the village as a signal to the outsiders about the ceremony. The symbol attached to the decorated bamboo splits used for the purpose is understandable to all tribal communities of the state. Traditionally, capital punishment was the usual punishment for the violators of these prescription. At present, however, the punitive measures have been softened remarkably. To use the Durkhemian terminology, the nature of traditional laws has changed from repressive to reformative mode.

Besides the powers and spirits described above, the Molsoms worship some deities. These deities are supposed to be benevolent by nature and most of them are, by some means, related to social or other activities of the Molsoms. Tuisangro, Arthengoi, Thingkungnoi, Samalaimilika, Baklak etc. are some such deities. Tuisangro is believed to be the god of femininity; Thingkungnoi of masculinity; Arthengoi of perfection and Samalaimilika of over all development of life. These four deities are collectively worshipped by the Awchai by sacrificing two hens during Pantapui ceremony during a social marriage.

In Molsom society some rites and rituals are performed at some important stages in the life of an individual such as birth, attainment of puberty,

marriage, death etc. The Aburzuk rite is performed after the birth of a baby; Takbrokmi and Punmizel are performed during the first occasion of wearing of cloth by the boys and girls respectively; Risabom, when girls attain puberty; Adende, Tusin, Pantapui, Dalani, Oaikbulfulpantate etc. during marriage ; Besu, Zuthak etc. after death. All these rites are the rites of passage as these are associated with some transitional stage in the life of an individual member of the society. On the other hand, the religious rites like annual worship of Sangrak and Khoser may be called the rites of intensification because these rites emphasize on some basic value of their society which also promote social interaction.

Influence of Hinduism and Christianity on the Religious Practices of the Molsoms:

It is not known how and when exactly the Molsoms came under the influence of Hinduism, though they claim themselves to be Hindu since the time immemorial. However, a good number of animistic traits are found in their religious activities which are in practice even today. Some of these animistic traits appear to be contradictory to Hinduism in so far as religious activities, especially those prevailing among the neighbouring Bengali Hindus, are concerned. Married Molsom women, for instance, do not use vermilion, conch bangles or iron bracelets which are commonly used as the signs of a married women especially among the neighbouring Bengali Hindu women. In fact, there is no symbolic dress or ornament which can differentiate a married Molsom woman from an unmarried one. A few of them follow Baishnabism and worship lord Krishna and Radha. These Vaishnabs were, as neighbouring Bengali Vaishnabs do, a set of Tulshimala around their neck and paint Tilok (the holy clay of the Gangas and other holy places) on different places of their body; but most of them take nonvegitarian food like pork, fish, dry fish, etc. which the neighbouring Bengali vaishnabs regard as tabooed. They worship some of the Hindu goddesses but in their system of worship some animistic rites are also followed. They worship, for instance, the goddess of Laxmi but instead of making an idol of the goddess, they make the image of Laxmi with rice and egg. They keep some rice in an earthen pot and place an egg longitudinally on the rice. Then they place the earthen pot containing rice and egg under a bamboo-made rectangular structure locally known as *roseng*. Laxmi is worshiped by

them generally on the full-moon day by sacrificing a hen and by offering local liquor and egg. It may be worth mentioning here that activities like sacrificing of animal, use of alcoholic liquor, egg etc. are the animistic traits in their worship of Laxmi which are found to be in practice along with Pranam, Zoker, fasting etc., which are religious activities performed by the Hindus. Thus the Molsoms have been following a number of traditional religious practices along with some Hindu religious activities.

Conversion to Christianity started among the Molsoms from the middle part of this century. Though it is not possible in this study to record the actual number of Hindus among the Molsoms in the state, yet it may be stated that there are quite a considerable number of Christians among the Molsoms many of whom I met personally. However, among the Molsoms Hindus outnumber the Christians. In our sample villages 86.88 percent of the households are reported to be Hindus and the rest 13.12 percent are Christians.

One may deserve a few things about the Christian Molsoms as have been observed about the Molsom Vaisnabites. The Christian Molsoms follow some of their traditional customs, values, norms etc. which very often go against their religious sanctity as Christians. Mention may be made about their practice of animal sacrificing during the worship of some spirits to get rid of decease.

Table-14

Distribution of sample households according to their religious affiliation

Name of religion	Total no. of house holds in practice	Percentage to total sample households
Hinduism	278	86.99
Christianity	42	13.12
Total	**320**	**100.00**

The spread of Christianity among a section of them has not created any sense of isolation so far as other cultural activities, except religion, are concerned. The Christian Molsoms attend the socio-religious rites, ceremonies, etc. of their Hindu neighbours. They obey, participate in, and depend on the traditional village council as do their Hindu neighbours.

CHAPTER - 9

Music, Dance and Games

The Molsoms are rich with indigenous music, musical instruments and dances. In the process of socialization, along with other culture-traits, an individual Molsom learns these music and dances. It is rare to find a Molsom without some skill, at least, in vocal music. Almost in all ceremonies, rites and rituals, song and dance form an integral part .The words of a Molsom song may vary from place to place, person to person or group to group, but there is always some basic similarities. The tune of a particular type of song remains more or less akin. Such variation in lyric-composition occurs due to the fact that in most of the cases these are composed then and there by the singer or singers in the frame of a particular tune structure. And the basic similarity which can be found in such compositions results from the fact that the content and the environment are common for a particular type of song. However, the words of the Molsom songs are very similar, simple and in most of the cases the verses do not maintain rhyme and rhythm. A particular subject, in such songs, is highlighted through some allegorical examples drawn and cited from the surrounding environment and every day experiences regarding nature and life.

The songs of the Molsoms may broadly be categorised in four major types. These are the songs sung during work, love songs, religious songs and songs sung during works. In most cases, songs sung during works are related to some work-activities like seed-sowing, weeding, harvesting etc. In jhum cultivation, such sorts of work-activities are done in group and the speed and unity of the team-work are maintained by the rhythm of music especially songs. These songs are jhum-songs locally known as *Haihaklo* . A person from a team, in jhum-song, composes a few lines based on a particular tune-structure and he then sings those lines loudly which the others of the team repeat in chorus maintaining some musical time-beat, that is, Tala. The subject matter of such composition is based on and related to the system or process

of the concerning activities. The lyric of a jhum-song which is sung during the seed sowing activities, for instance, is usually composed describing the process of seed sowing such as how to dig a hole, how to put seeds in the hole, from which corner of the field sowing is to be started, or any other instructions required to be conveyed to any person of the team and so on. In most cases no drum-like instrument is played on to accompany such jhum songs. Love songs are also sung in the jhum field especially when growing crops are kept under watch by the youngsters.

When cornstalk grow the youths of a Molsom village shift temporarily to their watch house to facilitate constant vigil. This period of watching, traditionally is also the time for mate selection among the Molsom and other tribals of the state. In the jhum field the love song are generally sung by two parties—a boy's party and a girl's party. At a time, one person from each related to love and romance are put through songs to the other party which the latter replies through song sung by one of the members. In most cases, a boy and a girl from each of the parties lead the respective teams. Sometimes a competitive spirit develops between the parties which try to defeat each other through a tough puzzle or question.

Also, during religious rites and ceremonies songs are invariably sung. The lyric of a religious song, in most cases, is related to various activities of the respective rite, ritual etc. or, sometime, those are composed to sing the glory of the respective deity or spirit. Besides the type of song mentioned above, some songs are also sung during some every day activities or during some other rituals and ceremonies related to birth, puberty, marriage etc. The lyric of such songs are also composed and performed during the observance of respective rituals and ceremonies.

Some traditional Molsom songs along purport in english are cited below:

1. Love song locally known as *ro owl :*

A boy sings following a girl :

HO HO HO HO
KUNAUNU DUM DOINU NANGMA LE KUMA
MA LE KOIMA EI mulung
A roi ŋung dumderta
Maisher ugan mangaiti

(Love me o beautiful girl | If you love me, I shall solve all problems of our life - however tough they may be. I shall collect fire from firefly and light lamp for our use.)

The girl replies and sings :

Ohaipa rukum kokidik kadak
O roimi rangoi asu
Lau ponkul kunte thingbu kurung oampa
Kaichu noming roimi
Aio noming do roimi.

(Your lips are as odd looking as lips of pelican, your voice is as rude as the voice of owl and you look like a half burnt tree of jhum. I don'n love you).

The boy makes more protestations of love and sings :

Kunaunu vaidumnu
Nangma le keima ei molung aroimung
kongmui ta khrom mangeiti
Jeokoma uitang ngan mangeiti
Thakpui nom mulung mangeiti
Laiphang kung meiphum mangeiti

(O my dear, love me. I entrent you. If you love me, nothingn of this world I shall care for. I shall make shoe with thron, treat tiger as if they were pet dogs, sleep on a mat made of a poisonous leaf locally known as *thakpui* and set fire on banana plant).

Another girl from the girl's team sings to convince the girl:

O roimioi O roimioi
Kha kha khom timrao
Thui thui khom timrao
Abuisu dina chu
Nidan nongchulat
O roimioi.

(O my friend, O my friend. Don't refuse him in such a rough way. You will not remain unmarried for ever. So, it is better that you accept his proposal for you may get all sorts of hepl from this boy in future.)

The girl replies :

Thing thing timaro O roimioi
Kemil munu cheno
Nunga risirnong kemil khom aisu
Khomlung khom aisu.

(Don't tell me to love him, my friend. I don't feel any such urge within me now. My heart is not dictating me to love now. So, Don't tell me to love now).

Another person from the boy's party sings to convince the girl :

Kikham osut khum khum osut
Roaknin aiomsin
O roimioi hakan timaro

(Days are not so short, and years too are not fleeing away. You should think for your future. Please don't refuse him outright. He loves you so much, so you shall also love him).

The girl replies :

O roimioi O roimioi
Kokopal aisu borok kohoipek omak
Kehe bauka rongo aisu
Chong bau kete nangma ket
Khomokon chinin omket

(O my friend, O my friend. Please try to understand me. And listen to me for the last time that, I want to live like a free bird).

2. A religious song use to sung during the worship of goddes Lihki. This song is lically known as *Likhi thak lo*.

This is accompanied by a dance. This song is sung solo or duet.

O adunpu khuri khomhongma
Uong khomhongma
Ainu likhi tau berai ohong
Chilo khomhongma, jaklam khomhongma
Chatrai huluin
In kaihai mohongnin panther
Phonin einu Likhirang
Hailam nin haisokhgo

(Hallo householder . Please open your door. Don't be afraid. No ghost or ghoul has come, but our mother Likhi has come. So light the lamp, burn dhup and spread a new piece of cloth on the floor and place our mother on it).

3. A lullaby :

E le le le le kosapo zung bong te
Tangoal nchang nung nungak ngoi le
Nurlumrang laulampo uganhore rang
Oapoul zong joulou
Oahazong jou lau ngathan rang
Basapang dondrai nu mu tang rang
E le le le le eno oaisen.

(O my deer child | You sleep, sleep now. You will soon become elder and then you will go to the jhum field with many young girls. You will cultivate jhum and perticipate in mutual exchange of labour. You will cultivate such a big plot of land that a big bird, locally known as Oapoul, will fail to cross it. Your crop-store will be so big that you have to use a ladder to take crop out of it. My little child, you sleep, sleep now).

4. A song of frustration :

A girl, rejected by a boy to whom she offered her love sings :

Hoia hoia kaimato kopal kopol rephana

Janaitau kochampic do
Komar baniom komar saritei
Retaino kosampic do
Hoia hoia kaimato kopal rephna.

(Alas ! It seems my fate is full of misery. Therefore I am so ugly looking and nobody looks at me).

The notation of first song naimly Haihak lo's first paragrapg and a song of fustration are given below .

The tune of every paragraph of the first song is the same, therefore we have prduced only the tune of first paragraph. The notation is done based on Aker Matrik Swaralipi system. The notation is written in Bengali and wordings of lyric are written in English.

Notation of first song :

(Kunaunu dum doinu .....)

Notation of the song of frustratation

(Hoia hoia kaimato .....)

Note: For our convenience, in lieu of 'O' of Aker Matrik Swaralipi system we have used 'O'

Musical Instruments

A variety of indigenous musical instruments are found to be in used in musical pursuits of the Molsom. Almost all of these musical instruments are made of indigenous materials and are played generally in accompaniment with songs and dances and sometimes independently.

According to the purpose of use and the nature of sound, the Molsom musical instruments may be categorized, broadly, into two types, namely, Tala (musical time beat) producing and tune producing instruments. Tala producing instruments are used to mark and maintain the rhythm and Laya of the music and dance. Khong, Dhakri, Dhelki etc. are such instruments. Brief description of the Tala producing instruments of the Molsoms is given below:

Khong

It is made of a piece of hollow log and dry skin of goat or cow. This is played with hand or bamboo or wooden sticks. It can be played on both sides. A khong is generally used as an accompanying instrument with song, dances and other musical instruments or, in a few cases, independently. The size and shape of a khong is more or less similar to the Dholak used in the neighboring plain society.

Dhakri

A Dakri can be played on only one side and is made of wooden log and animal skin. Traditionally a Dakri is used for making public announcements—to invite people for a mass gathering, to proclaim a war etc. Different specific symbolic sounds are produced on the Dhekri to announce publicly of particular occurrences like death, mass gathering etc. Besides being used for public announcements, a Dhakri is, sometime, used as an accompanying musical instrument with songs and dances.

Dhelki

A Dhelki is also played on only one side and is made of small, hollow wooden log and animal skin. This small conical shaped dhelki is used as an accompanying instrument with song, dance or other musical instruments.

There are mainly two to three types of tune producing instruments found among the Molsoms. These are string instruments such as Chongpreng, Sarinda, Ditra etc., and flute, locally known as Sukmul. In the string instruments, tune is produced through vibration of a string or strings. Some of the tune producing instruments which are found among the Molsom are described below :

Chongpreng

It is a four stringed musical instrument made of wood and bamboo. Four iron or steel strings, in chongpreng, are set on a hollow structure, the length of which varies from about fourteen to eighteen inches. The base of the structure is more or less oval in shape and is connected to a semicircular platform, the upper surface of which is flat. Strings are set on the plain surface of the wooden structure by fixing each of the two ends of the

strings to the corresponding extreme of the structure-each string being separate from the other strings by equal distance. At the base, strings are fixed over a bamboo bridge so that they do not touch the body of the wooden structure and at the other end, these are fixed to the structure through four bamboo rods which are inserted into four holes made at two sides of the platform. These rods can be twisted clockwise or anticlock-wise making the strings tight or loose. Tune is produced by the rubbing of a bow made of bamboo and tree-fibers. The intensity of the tune is regulated by controlling the working-length (length of string between two closed ends) of the strings and by working on their base by the fingers of the left hand. Shorter the working-length of the string higher is the intensity of sound produced. Tuning of the string may be done by twisting the rods. Chongpreng is played independently or in the company of other musical instruments, or with dance or a song. The structure and playing mechanism of a Chongpreng is, more or less, similar to those of a violin.

Sarinda

The Sarinda is also a four stringed musical instrument made of wood and bamboo. The structure, playing mechanism and tune controlling system of a Sarinda are almost similar to those of a Chongpreng. But in size and shape it is larger then a Chongpreng.

Ditra

It is a two stringed instrument. The structure and tune producing and controlling mechanism are almost the same as those of a chongpreng with a little difference in the structure. The upper surface of the base of a ditra is covered with a piece of animal skin. Sound is produced, unlike from chongpreng and sarinda, by stroking on the strings at base with a small and sharp piece of wood or bamboo. Ditra is played solo or in company of other musical instruments, songs or dance. The structure and playing mechanism of a ditra are similar to those of a Dotara used by the neighboring Bengalis. In fact, the name Ditra might be the corrupted from the Bengali name of Dotara.

Flute

Among the Molsoms flutes are found in various sizes. The intensity of the tune of a flute varies according to its size. Shorter the length and breadth

of a flute, higher is the intensity of tune produced. The length of a Molsom flute generally varies from about eight to fourteen inches. It is made of a special variety of bamboo. For making a flute, the portion between two nodes of a piece of bamboo is cut and separated from the main body to obtain an open-end tube like structure. On the bamboo-tube seven small and round holes are made in a straight-line row. Of these seven holes, one, made near an end of the tube, is treated as upper part. The other six holes are made on the middle part of the tube. The space between the holes remains equal in length. Air is blown, for playing a flute, through the upper most holes and the range of the tune is regulated by closing or opening the holes, through which air is allowed to pass out, by the use of fingers of both the hands. Generally thumbs are not used. When air is allowed to pass out through the upper holes of the row, the intensity of tune becomes high and vice versa. A flute is played solo or as an accompanying instrument with other musical instruments, songs and dances.

Dance

A Molsom dance may be performed solo, duet or in group. The males as well as females take part in dance. During various activities of the Molsom life, dances are performed. Dance in Molsom is known as *Lam* . Some of the Mlsom dances are described below :

Haihak lam

Haihak lam is performed when jhum crops are, for the first time, cooked and taken. The ceremony is locally known as *Sarbing* .In haihak lam is commonly known as jhum dance where the male and female members of a village dance in a group imitating the movement and activities of jhum cultivation, such as jhum cutting, seed sowing, weeding, harvesting etc. A haihak lam is generally accompanied by a *haihak lo* or jhum song and accompanied by musical instruments of both beating and tune producing types. A haihak lam is also performed during a galaday gathering.

Likhithak lam

This is also a group dance performed by three persons—one female and two males. This is performed during the worship of Likhi. Through this dance sacred paddy of Likhi worship is distributed among all the

households of a village. The girl of the dancing team carries the sacred paddy in a bamboo basket from door to door, moving her body in a style as if she is the goddess Likhi. The two male members of the team sing Likhithak lo and follow the girl. They go to every house of the village and the girl distribute the sacred paddy.

Labang or Chongpreng Lam

This dance is performed in accompaniment of only the tune of chongpreng and therefore the dance is known as *chongpreng lam*. In a galaday like that of a social marriage, a community feast, or a feast after a group hunting the adult members, both male and female, of a Molsom village take part in this dance. After drinking zukola or country liquor they jump, hop, shake and move their bodies as they like without following any fixed rhythm of style. The dance does not seem to have a set style for itself. Generally no beating instrument accompanies this dance.

Muroi Lam

This dance is based on a Molsom folklore related to a pregnant women who became a ghoul for violating the norms and customs followed by the pregnant women in the Molsom society. In Molsom society a pregnant women is called Muroi , after whom the dance is named. Three males are involved in this dance. Two males dance in the role of two vultures and the third dances in the role of a ghoul. During the dance, at first, two persons move their bodies and make gestures as if two vulture are eating a dead body. After that the third male appears and moves his body in a manner as if he is chasing away the vultures. He then plays a ghoul eating the flash of that dead body after having succeeded in driving away the vultures . No music or song accompanies this dance. In fact it is an acting based dance.

Sarhil Lam

This is a group dance performed mainly by the females. It is performed during a galaday of a ceremonial gathering. Two pastels, for this dance, are kept side by side on the ground having an open space of about fourteen to sixteen inches between them. Two more pastels are then kept crosswise on the first set making a square in the open space between

the four pastels. Four boys hold the tips of each set of pastels with their hand—each set of pastels are held by the two boys who sit face to face. The boys then start closing and spreading their pastel-set in a set rhythm maintaining a tempo. Thus in course of closing and spreading the pastels, an open square space is formed alternately between the pastels. Some girls are made to stand in a row in that open space between the pastels. They start dancing in such a way that in course of spreading the pastels they step in the open space and before the pastels are closed they step out. The process continues in a cyclic way. The dance started with a slow rhythm but ends in a high tempo.

The music and dance form an essential part of the Molsom culture. In fact, these are functionally related to their way of life. The dance and music are used as the special mode of communication, expressing the mind of the group or an individual, which helps in maintaining social solidarity. The Haihaklam, for instance, facilitates team-work during jhuming operation; love song helps in selecting mate; Muroilam is used as a means of social control especially over the pregnant woman as it threatens them against breaking the norms and other expected behaviours to be followed by them. The group songs and group dances reproduce, time and again, the social, group-solidarity, symbolically, despite tendencies towards greater social differentiation.

Games and Sports

A number of indigenous games are played by the Molsoms, especially by the children and youths. In most cases these out-door games are played between two parties. Some of the Molsom games are detailed out on the pages to follow.

Laisdi Pardi

This game is played between two parties with the seeds of a local plant used as striker or pawns locally known as *poi*. The number of members for both the parties has to be equal and it varies from four to eight persons for a team. On the ground two parallel straight lines are drawn at about fifteen feet distance from each other. The game starts with one of the teams winning the toss for choosing its line and getting first strike. The toss is done with a piece of bamboo-split. The winner

of the toss chooses a line on which they stand side by side each with a striker in his hand. The members of the other team keep their striker on the opposite line in front of every member of the toss winning team. The members of the toss-winning team try to dislodge the strikers of the opposite party from the line by striking at them with their own strikers in one chance. The players who can strike the striker of the opposite party and throw them out of the line get another chance to hit at the striker again in the second round and a failure is treated as disqualification. In the second round, they go over to the line of their opponents and stand facing their own line, behind the respective striker which they dislodge in the first round. They are now to send the striker out side the line on which they stood at the start of the game. They have to do this within five strokes the number of strikers which cross the line is taken to be the number of points in favour of the striking team. The game continues for an equal number of rounds for both the teams and the team which gathers highest number of points is declared as the winner.

Apangte

Apangte is played by two teams having equal number of players. It is played with two Pois. Here also two straight lines are drawn the same way as in the case of Laisdi pardi and the game starts with the toss-winning team making the first strike. It takes six successive rounds for the completion of the game. A player of the striking party, in the first round, stands on a line and throws a poi towards the second line but drops on the ground as near as possible to the second line. If the Poi crosses or touches the second line, the player who throw the Poi is treated as disqualified and in such a case another player of the team has to play. In the second round the player takes another poi, which is used as a striker, and he places the poi on his toes. He then goes and stands on the second line. He has to touch the first Poi with the striker-poi on his toes and as soon as the two Pois came in contact he lifts one of his legs from the ground and picks up the striker-poi with one of his hands. He then comes back to the first line by leaping with one leg. In the third round the player takes the striker-poi in between first and second toes of his right leg. He then goes to the second line and stands on it. He has to touch the

first Poi with the striker-poi held between his toes. If he succeeds, he returns to the first line. In the fourth round he takes the striker-poi in between his lips, start clapping, goes to the second line and stands on it. He then drops the Poi from his lips on the second poi and as soon as the striker-poi touches the second one, as in case of the former round, he lifts up one of his legs from the ground and comes back to the first line by leaping. In the fifth round the player keeps the Poi on his head , starts clapping, goes over the second line and stands on it. He then drops the Poi from his head on the second Poi and as in the previous cases, comes back to the first line by leaping. He then in the sixth round, stands on the first line with his leg spread and head bent between the legs. He throws the striker-poi towards the second line in such a way that it encircles his body longitudinally before it drops on the ground, and at the same time, it must not touch or cross the second line. In this case special credit is given to the player if he can hit the second Poi and in such a case the player is exempted from doing other activities of his round. The player then, in case he failed to hit the second Poi, goes and stand near the second Poi and throws his striker-poi in such a way that it encircles his body longitudinally before it strikes the second one lying on the ground. In this case also he has to stand with his legs apart and head bent between his legs. If he succeeds in hitting the second Poi, he takes both the Pois on his head and goes back to the first line. The successful completion of all the six stages is treated as a score. Failure in any of the rounds is treated as disqualification of the respective player and in such a case another player of the team gets the chance and he has to start from the stage in which the previous player failed to attain success. In case all the players of a team fail to complete all the stages of a round, the other team gets the chance and, in such a case, no point is awarded to the former team.

In successful completion of all the six stages by a team in a an equal number of chances the team which scores the highest number of pints is declared to be the winner.

Formit

This is also played by two teams having equal number of players on both the sides. Each team takes a coloured Poi. Pois of two different

colours are taken so that a team can identify its own Poi. Two parallel straight lines, having forty to fifty cubit distance from each other, are drawn on the ground and of these two lines one is used as the starting line and other as the finishing line. The distance between the lines differ depending on the strength of the number of the team. The more the number of members in the team the greater is the distance kept between the lines. Here also the winner of the toss starts playing. The Poi of the opponent team is kept at about three cubit distance from the starting line and a player of the opponent team hits the Poi of the other team with the Poi of his own team -which is used as striker—to make the latter advance towards the finishing line. A player gets five successive chances and with the endeavour of every player of a team the total number of times the second Poi takes to cross the finishing line is treated as the number of points scored by the respective team.

Poi Rukap

This game is played by two players with Pois of two different colours. In the field two straight lines are drawn in the same way, as in the case of Formit game described above. But the distance between the two lines, in this case, is ten to fifteen cubits. Here also the winner of the toss begins the game. The beginner stands on the straight starting line and throws a poi towards the second line in such a way that it would not touch or cross the second line. He tries to keep the Poi as near as possible to the second line. He then hits the first Poi with the second one by dropping the latter successively from the various parts of his body namely, toes, feet, in between two knees, in between two thighs, arm pit, shoulder, in between two lips, nose, eyes, forehead and head. For this, he keeps the Poi on the respective part of body, goes and stands on the second line. He drops it on the second Poi and if it hits the latter, he collects the striker-poi and goes back to the starting line. A player continues playing until he fails to hit the second Poi by the striker-poi in any of the stage of the game. In case of a failure, the opponent gets a chance and the unsuccessful player, in his next chance, is to start from the stage where he failed during previous chance. In the equal number of chances the player who scores the highest point is declared as the winner.

In the games and sports of the Molsoms it may be observed that balance, aim and the patience are the essential qualities which are required for a player to be successful. These qualities, in fact, are most essential ones which help a person to cope with the hill-entourage and life-style. Thus, through the practice of indigenous games and sports the Molsom youths can prepare themselves for activities like hunting, fishing, climbing etc. where balance, aim, patience are especially needed. Apart from their 'essence' games and sports are good source of entertainment and therefore form an essential part of Molsom life and culture.

CHAPTER - 10

Conclusion

RELATION OF MOLSOM WITH OTHER TRIBALS AND NON TRIBALS OF THE STATE:

The Molsoms are, by nature, very simple, peace loving and hospitable. They have friendly relations with other tribals and nontribals of the state. Though in the long past, at times, some rivalry was there especially with the neighboring tribal groups. In those days, the trespassers into a Molsom village or jhum area were severely punished, sometimes with capital punishment, by their village council. In fact, such strict restrictions were also observed by other tribal groups of the state which resulted, sometimes, in inter tribe conflicts. But those days are gone. Every community is at present very much acceptable to the Molsoms. And thus many matrimonial relations are taking place with the members of other communities and they are permitting the people of other communities to be a part of the Molsom society. They had good relations with the then rulers of Tripura especially as some of the men of the royal family had married Molsom girls. In fact the Molsom girls are well known in the state for their beauty. Regarding the marital relations of the Molsom girls with the members of the royal family there is a hearsay popular among them which goes as follows.

In the long past there was a king in Tripura who had two queens - one Tripuri and other Molsom. The prince born of the Molsom queen was elder. There was deep intimacy between the princes. But after the death of the king dissension arose between the queens regarding succession to the throne. Both the queens wanted to make her son the successor to the throne. At last the royal priest found a way to solve the deadlock. He arranged for a test and decided that the worthier would be the next king. The priest let loose a white elephant into a forest nearby and told the queens that the princes who would first come back to the palace by riding the elephant next day before sun set would succeed the throne.

Accordingly on the next morning the two princes went to the forest and started searching for the elephant from two different sides of the forest. Within a few hours, the elder prince found the elephant but he could not ride on it as he did not know how to command and drive an elephant. He then decided to ride on it with the help of a ladder and went to a bamboo-clump to collect bamboo for making ladder. In the mean time the younger prince came there and found the elephant and rode it. He thus came back to the palace riding the elephant and was declared the successor to the throne. However, the relation between the brothers remained cordial. The new king provided the traditional throne to his elder brother in the royal court and made a new throne for himself. He used to take advice from his elder brother on matter of royal duties. Since that period, the Molsom believe, they have been getting warm reception from the royal families. And thus in the customary tribal gathering (known as Hasam Bhojan) in the palace they used to be provided with the first seat in the community dinner.

The interrelationship between the Molsoms and the other tribal communities of the state is also healthy. This may be evidenced from the fact that a number of Molsoms can speak and understand some other tribal dialects such as Tripuri, Jamatia, Reang and Kuki. In case of interaction with the members of an unknown language group, they talk in Bengali. In this regard it is worth mentioning that a good number of peole of all of the tribal groups in Tripura can speak Bengali.

An intimate relation between the Molsoms and the non-tribals, especially the Bengalis, also has been prevailing ever since the first Molsom-Bengali interaction. In fact, this close relations of the Molsom with the Bengalis may have helped the former to accept the techniques of settled cultivation.

MOLSOM DIGITS (1-100) AND THEIR ENGLISH EQUIVALENT

Molsom Digit.	**Englisg equivalent**
Khatka	One
Nika	Two
Thumka	Three

Molsom Digit.	Englisg equivalent
Mili	Four
Ringa	Five
Urka	Six
Siri	Seven
Ritka	Eight
Kok	Nine
Som	Ten
Somleikhatka	Eleven
Somleinika	Twelve
Somleithumka	Thirteen
Somleimilika	Fourteen
Somleiringaka	Fifteen
Somleiuruka	Sixteen
Somleisirika	Seventeen
Somleiriatka	Eighteen
Somleikokka	Nineteen
Somnika	Twenty
Somnika khatka	Twentyone
Somnika inika	Twenty-two
Somnika uthumka	Twenty-three
Somnika milika	Twenty-four
Somnika rignaka	Twenty-five
Somnika uruka	Twenty-six
Somnika sirika	Twenty-seven
Somnika riatka	Twenty-eight
Somnika kokka	Twenty-nine
Somthumka	Thirty
Somthumka khaki	Thirtyone

Molsom Digit.	Englisg equivalent
Somthumka inika	Thirty-two
Somthumka uthumka	Thirty-three
Somthumka milika	Thirty-four
Somthumka rignaka	Thirty-five
Somthumka uruka	Thirty-six
Somthumka sirika	Thirty-seven
Somthumka riatka	Thirty-eight
Somthumka kokka	Thirty-nine
Sommilika	Forty
Sommilika khaki	Fourteen
Sommilika inuika	Forty-two
Sommilika thumka	Forty-three
Sommilika uthumka	Forty-four
Sommilika rignaka	Forty-five
Sommilika uruka	Forty-six
Sommilika sirika	Forty-seven
Sommilika riatka	Forty-eight
Sommilika kokka	Forty-nine
Somrignaka	Fifty
Somrignaka khatka	Fifty-one
Somrignaka inika	Fifty-two
Somrignaka uthumka	Fifty-three
Somrignaka milika	Fifty-four
Somrignaka rignaka	Fifty-five
Somrignaka uruka	Fifty-six
Somrignaka sirika	Fifty-seven
Somrignaka riatka	Fifty-eight
Somrignaka kokka	Fifty-nine

Molsom Digit.	Englisg equivalent
Somrukka	Sixty
Somrukka khatka	Sixty-one
Somrukka inika	Sixty-two
Somrukka uthumka	Sixty-three
Somrukka milika	Sixty-four
Somrukka rignaka	Sixty-five
Somrukka urukka	Sixty-six
Somrukka sirika	Sixty-seven
Somrukka riatka	Sixty-eight
Somrukka kokka	Sixty-nine
Somsirika	Seventy
Somsirika khatka	Seventy-one
Somsirika inika	Seventy-two
Somsirika uthumka	Seventy three
Somsirika milika	Seventy-four
Somsirika rignaka	Seventy-five
Somsirika urukka	Seventy-six
Somsirika sirika	Seventy-seven
Somsirika riatka	Seventy-eight
Somsirika kokka	Seventy-nine
Somriatka	Eighty
Somriatka khatka	Eighty-one
Somriatka inika	Eighty-two
Somriatka uthumka	Eighty-three
Somriatka milika	Eighty-four
Somriatka ringnaka	Eighty-five
Somriatka uruka	Eighty-six
Somriatka sirika	Eighty-seven

Molsom Digit.	Englisg equivalent
Somriatka riatka	Eighty-eight
Somriatka kokka	Eighty-nine
Somkokka	Ninety
Somkokka khatka	Ninety-one
Somkokka inika	Ninety-two
Somkokka uthumka	Ninety-three
Somkokka milika	Ninety-four
Somkokka rignaka	Ninety-five
Somkokka uruka	Ninety-six
Somkokka riatka	Ninety-seven
Somkokka sirika	Ninety-eight
Somkokka kokka	Ninety-nine
Rizaka	Hundred.

GLOSSARY:

ENGLISH VERSION OF SOME COMMON MOLSOM WORDS

Human body :

Molsom	English	Molsom	English
Ban	Arm	Bok	Breast
Bunek kut	Right hand	Chang	Chest
Dar	Shoulder	Fung	Belly
Ha	Tooth	Keipbai	Ankle
Kiu	Elbow	Kothehen	Wrist
Kulzangul	Lower arm	Kuth muja	Palm
Kuth mitin	Nail	Kuth puinu	Thumb
Kuth chal	Pointed finger	Kuth lei	Middle finger
Kuth teuk	Ring finger	Kuth te	Little finger
Lu	Head	Mai	Chick

Molsom	English	Molsom	English
Malai	Navel	Mal	Thigh
Mether	Vagina	Mit	Eye
Ring	Neck	Ring	Backbone
Rukhuk	Knee	Sam	Hair
Noro	Hay	Su	Female genital
Oisul	Turmeric	Sumul	Female sex hair
Pasto	Cotton plant	Wai kut	Left hand
Ro	Bamboo	Zang	Male genital
Rumui	Rose-apple	Zangtil	estis
Saran	Cotton thread	Zangmul	Male sex hair
Serok	Oil	Si	Sesame

Vegetables, plant etc. :

Molsom	English	Molsom	English
Song	Paddy	Amhong	Pungent
Tentra	Tamarind	Ankelki	Lady's finger
Thaihai	Mango	Beel	Marmelo
Thing	Ginzer	Bol	Potato
Zing thakkutui	Sweet potato	Chongroi	Chili

Animals, birds etc.:

Molsom	English	Molsom	English
Dumbai	Cucumber	Goam	Guava
Arjel	Hen	Goiphol	Papaya
Aok,Uok	Pig	Jhinko	Cucurbitaceous
Kumoi	Pumpkin	Balad	Bullock
Laiphang	Banana plant	Dumderta	Fire fly
Lau	Bottle gourd	Banthe	Dryfish

Molsom	English	Molsom	English
Laue	Jack fruit	Gyotak	Duck
Lichu	Leechee	Kei	Tiger
Mantu	Bringel	Kel	Goat
Meiser	Limon	Khao	Grass hopper
Michi	Salt	Kokidik	Owl
Mot	Banana	Lei khrek	Squirrel
Mula	Radish	Lim	Python
Matho	Fly	Chungin	Machan house
Murul	Snake	Dondrai	Stair
Muzu	Rat	Jian	Night
Ngo	Fish	Khosak	Village
Pharva	Pigeon	Kholau	Afternoon
Pholep	Butterfly	Khozing ribet	Evening
Sai	Elephant	Khuri	Ghoul
Sakhi	Deer	Kunou	Mother
Sakor	Horse	La	Song
Saloi	Buffalow	Lam	Dance
Sarat	Cow	Lo	Jhum
Singer	Wildcat	Lomphi	Duster
Singmir	Ant	Lungthu	Hearth
Jhakroi, Ua	Bird	Mangkhar	Funeral pyre
Ui	Dog	Meiot	Spinning
Uichok	Toad	Moi	Fire
Vam	Beer	Munui	Laugh
Zong	Monkey	Neing	Earth
Neupang	Child		

Miscellaneous :

Molsom	English	Molsom	English
Ni	Sun	Nungak	Young girl
Argas	Lamp	Numoi	Widow
Arshi	Star	Nupui	Bride
Belkinot	Roundish Earthen vessel	Oareng	Hammock
Bu	Boiled rice	Punchi	Clan
Chap	Cry	Pamai	Widower
Chang	Trap	Rekai	Marriage
Chem Nerthaitha	Hand chopper	Retai	Divorce
Remang	Dream	Ro	Cloud
fumui	Loom	Rukap	Sport
Samak	Bride groom	Samthi	Cumb
Sapang	Warehouse	Sekra	Sickle
Talai	Bier	Than	Crematorium
Tangoal	Young man	Thirti	Wind
Thow	Moon	Tui	Water
Tuikorong	Stream	Tuilom	River
Tiang	Morning		

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